

YOUNG KLONDIKE

STORIES OF A GOLD SEEKER

Issued Semi-Monthly—By Subscription \$1.25 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, by Frank Tousey.

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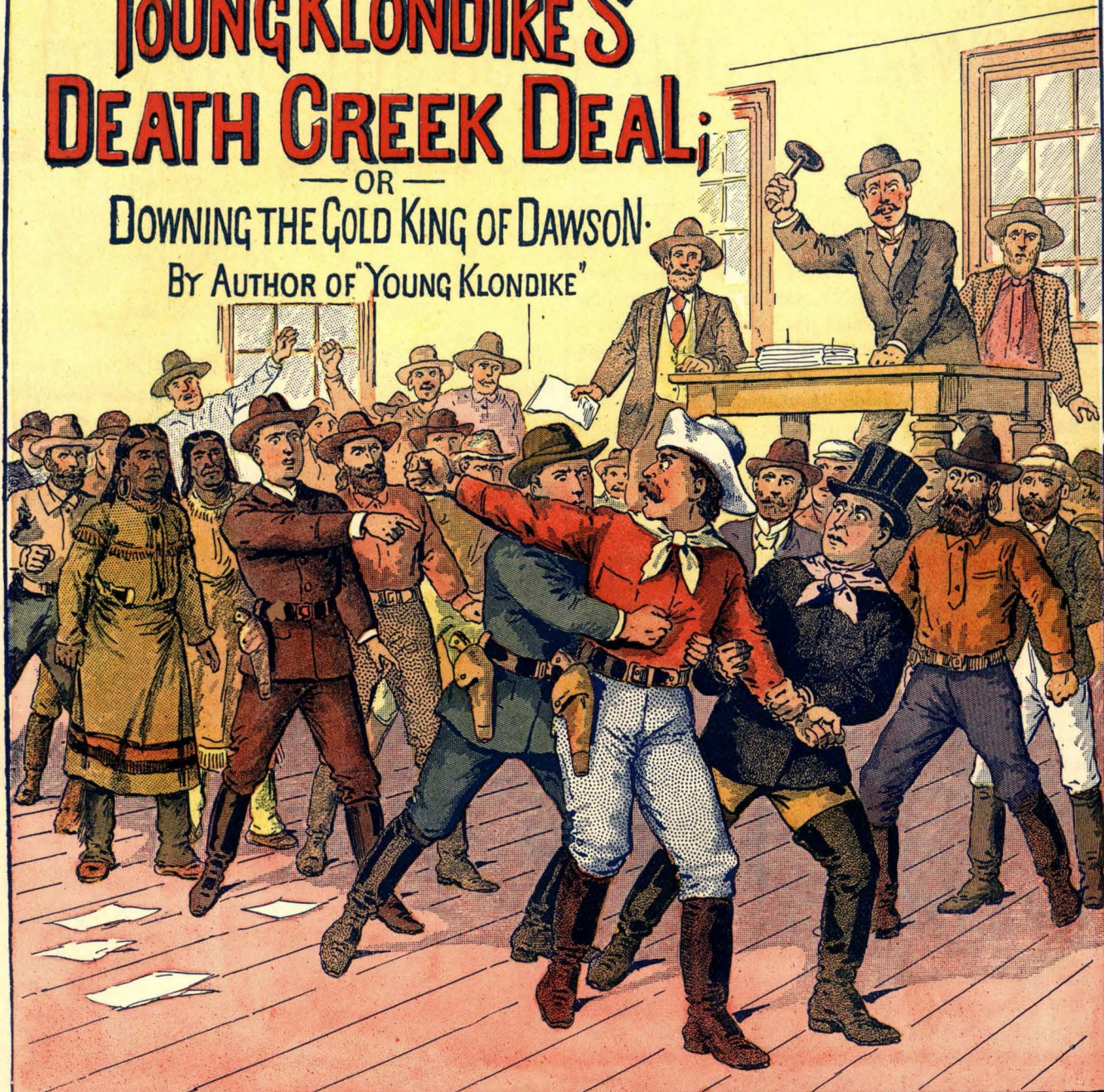
NEW YORK, DECEMBER 21, 1898.

Price 5 Cents.

YOUNG KLONDIKE'S DEATH CREEK DEAL;

—OR—
DOWNING THE GOLD KING OF DAWSON.

BY AUTHOR OF "YOUNG KLONDIKE"



"You have no right to interfere with me!" shouted the Gold King, shaking his fist at Young Klondike, as Dick and the Unknown started to drag him off the floor. "Off with him! He has broken the rules!" said Young Klondike. "He is no longer a member of the Dawson Mining Exchange."

YOUNG KLONDIKE.

➤ Stories of a Gold Seeker. ◀

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YOUNG KLONDIKE'S DEATH CREEK DEAL; — OR — DOWNING THE GOLD KING OF DAWSON.

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CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MIRAGE.

"THERE it is! Shoot now, Edith! Shoot now!"

Young Klondike pointed ahead over the ice toward a clump of cedars near the bank of the frozen river.

Edith Welton sprang up in the sleigh, and throwing off the bearskin which had been wrapped about her, brought the handsome Winchester rifle into position and let fly.

A caribou sprang out of the bushes, gave one leap into the air, and then staggering forward a few steps, fell dead on the ice.

"Done!" cried Dick Luckey. "You have downed him, Edith! That's a prize! It will give us our dinner at all events."

As Young Klondike applied the lash to the dogs and the sleigh went whizzing over the ice, a shot rang out behind them.

"That's the Unknown," said Young Klondike.

"He wants to know what all the firing is about."

"Shall I give him the signal?" asked Dick.

"I wish you would," replied Ned. "My hands are full here with the dogs."

Dick fired his revolver twice.

A hoarse shout was heard in the distance.

"That's Zed! What a voice he has," said Edith.

"He must be at least half a mile away."

But to hear one's voice that distance on a winter's afternoon in the Klondike country is nothing strange—where the atmosphere is so wonderfully clear.

Cold it was—forty below zero, at least—but our party made nothing of that.

They were well used to this sort of thing and well prepared for it, for be it understood this was the famous firm of Golden & Luckey, the mine magnates of

the Klondike, who were worth their millions, and they had no reason to deny themselves any comfort which money could buy.

Ned Golden and Dick Luckey were originally poor clerks in New York City, and were among the first to go out to the Klondike.

Fortune had been very good to them, and they had opened mines in many places and usually with the greatest success.

Their companion, Edith Welton, was a young girl whose life Ned had saved from a wrecked steamer on the voyage up from Seattle to Juneau. Edith was then on her way to Dawson City to find her father, and failing in this, decided to cast her fortunes with Ned Golden's party—in fact, Edith was a member of the firm.

One more member of that famous firm remains to be introduced, but it is not in our power to introduce him by name.

The Unknown.

Everyone who knows Golden & Luckey also knows the Unknown—rather a contradiction of terms, but we can't do any better, for the excellent reason that this singular character who had followed Young Klondike's fortunes ever since he first came to the gold country, persistently refused to disclose his name.

Why he did this was a mystery which no one could solve. The strange little man professed to be a detective; indeed he had papers proving such to be the case. His claim was that he had come to the Klondike in search of a certain mysterious criminal.

Who this individual was or what crime he had committed no one was ever able to learn. Like the detective's name it remained unknown.

Ned now urged the dogs forward, and the sled was soon halted beside the caribou.

The animal was quite dead, shot through the heart.

"Another example of your fine shooting, Edith," remarked Young Klondike. "Here's all the fresh meat we want for some days to come. Now to load this thing on to the sled in some way, if it can be done."

"We might leave it for the Unknown," suggested Dick. "He could easily tie it on top of his load."

"Leave it for the wolves which would be sure to get it before he comes along," replied Young Klondike. "No; I guess we can manage to tie it on behind here some way."

But they did not succeed. With three persons on board there was but little room left on the sleigh or sled—it was more of the former than the latter, being a comfortable two-seated affair which Young Klondike had had built expressly for themselves.

In the end they gave it up and decided to wait for the Unknown to come along, which he did after a little.

As soon as they saw the battered plug hat, which the little detective persisted in wearing winter and summer come into view around a bend in the river, the boys set up a shout.

"Hooray! Hello, there! By the Jumping Jeremiah, what have you killed now?" yelled the Unknown, in his fog-horn voice.

"Looks like a caribou!" cried Ned. "Come on! We want you to put it on your sled!"

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, I'm a-coming!" cried the detective, cracking his whip and touching up the dogs right and left.

On he flew over the ice, and was soon up with the other sled.

"A good, fat one!" he exclaimed. "Who's shooting—Edith's?"

"Yes," replied Ned.

"Ye gods and little fishes, I might have known it! Who but our Edith could take a caribou like that clear and clean through the heart? There's no one in this benighted Klondike country, and that's a solemn fact!"

"You can tie it on top of your load?" asked Dick.

"Certainly I can, and will, my lord."

"Do it, then," said Ned, "for it will soon be dark, and if we don't put ahead we shall never reach Barney McGraw's in time to tie up for the night."

"Time enough, time enough," said the detective, carelessly.

"Mebbe there is, but I don't care to do any more night traveling than I have to," replied Ned. "It will be dark inside of half an hour now."

They tied the caribou on top of the Unknown's load, and while they were about it, Edith remarked how much warmer it was getting.

"Why, yes; it must have risen as much as twenty degrees in the last half hour," said Dick.

"Yes, and it's rising still," added Ned. "If I thought it was going to continue I wouldn't stop at Barney's, but would put it right through into Bon-

anza creek and camp in the woods somewhere. We want to get to the Young Klondike Mine as early tomorrow as possible, and it will be precious late before we get there, if we put in the night at Barney's as we at first proposed."

They started soon after this, and before they had gone any great distance it became evident that one of those remarkable changes of temperature so common in the Klondike country had come now.

From forty degrees below zero the thermometer ran up to many degrees above, and the sudden change brought a thick mist over the valley of the Klondike.

Darkness had now come upon our travelers, and this in addition to the mist made it both difficult and dangerous to advance.

It was therefore decided to go into camp immediately, and not even wait to reach Barney McGraw's, an old mining camp near the mouth of Bonanza creek, which was in operation even before Young Klondike began his successful career.

The mouth of a small creek—frozen, of course, was discovered at the time this decision was reached, and into it Young Klondike turned the dog sled, running up into the woods which skirted the banks on both sides to the distance of a few hundred yards.

Here they halted and preparations for the night were immediately begun.

Now to the stranger the bed of the frozen creek and the dark fir trees would seem to offer but indifferent quarters for the night, for certainly the place was desolate to the last degree.

All this, however, did not disturb Young Klondike and his friends one bit.

They were well used to everything of the sort, and knew exactly what to do.

Edith and the Unknown got out two flat wooden shovels from the load on the second sled, and began to clear the snow away at a favorable spot where they were sheltered from the wind which came sweeping down the creek.

Meanwhile, Ned and Dick got out axes and cut down four spruce trees, lopping off the large lower branches of half a dozen more.

When they had as many of these as they thought were needed they returned to the place cleared, and the four stakes were driven down into the snow two and two at some little distance apart.

Then several long, thin poles were cut by felling the neighboring cedars.

Two of these were laid across the uprights and nailed into position.

The others were placed slanting from the ridge pole to the snow, and the spruce boughs piled up against them.

The work advanced with great rapidity, for it was being executed by master hands which had done it many times before.

In a surprisingly short time two brush huts had been constructed, one large and one small one.

The larger one was now divided into two parts

by suspending spruce boughs from the ridge pole downward in the middle.

One side was for the accommodation of the dogs, the other for Young Klondike, Dick and the Unknown, while the small hut was for Edith.

In such a shelter as this our friends had passed the night comfortably many times.

And the night now closing in upon them was no exception to the rule. They were perfectly comfortable there.

Wrapped in their blankets and furs with great fires blazing before the shelters the night passed without event.

It grew warmer if anything, and when Young Klondike awoke and went out of the hut at about six o'clock in the morning the fog was still very thick.

It was of little use to think of continuing their journey while this state of affairs lasted.

Young Klondike threw fresh wood on the fire, and taking his gun went out among the cedars to watch for rabbits.

Shooting rabbits in the dark is not easy business, but it happened to be an occupation which Ned was quite well accustomed to.

He strolled around for an hour or more, never allowing himself to get out of sight of the fire, and when at last he returned to camp he had eight fat rabbits; so there was no lack of provisions that day, for there was the caribou, too.

Dick was awake by this time and so was the Unknown, but Edith still slept.

While the detective hung the iron pot and built a fire under it, and cut a hole in the creek and drew water and attended to a number of other household duties, the boys skinned the caribou and cut it up, and prepared the rabbits for a stew.

Then the dogs were fed and the stew started, coffee was made, and when everything was ready Edith was called to breakfast.

Still the fog hung over them, but the Unknown predicted that it would be dissipated by sunrise, and his prediction proved quite true.

Along toward ten o'clock when the sun was booked to show itself, all hands went down to the edge of the woods at the mouth of the creek to see it come.

"She'll be up in a moment now," remarked Ned. "You can see the glow there in the east."

"And that ought to mean that the fog is thin," said Dick. "I should say that we ought to be able to start right away after day breaks."

"We'll be able to judge in a minute," replied Ned, "for here she comes now."

As Young Klondike spoke the sun rose in all its glory, and the mist immediately cleared away overhead, although it still held its own down on the river bed.

"It will soon be clear," said the detective; "we haven't got long to wait now."

While they waited, Young Klondike and his friends were treated to a rare sight.

Suddenly strange forms began to come into view above the mist.

It was as though they were looking at a distant city. They could see towers, steeples and battlements. There were houses by hundreds, stretching over a long distance, dimly seen above the line of mist.

"The mirage!" cried Young Klondike.

"That's what it is!" echoed the Unknown. "The mysterious city of Death Creek! We are looking at the most wonderful mirage in the world!"

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN WHO CAME OUT OF THE MIST.

"WONDERFUL!" exclaimed Edith. "What does it all mean?"

Edith was the first to break silence.

The mysterious city of the mist was rapidly fading away.

"You've asked a hard question," replied Ned. "I don't think that has ever been explained; but one thing is certain; we are in Death Creek, a place I have always meant to come to, but never did."

"I've often heard about the mirage of Death Creek," said Dick; "but like Edith I want to know more about it. Is there anybody here who can explain?"

"Well, I reckon I know as much about it as anybody," replied Ned, "and that is just nothing at all."

"But the city?" asked Edith, looking puzzled.

"Is all an optical delusion. It has been seen by many people. Off the coast of Alaska it is a common phenomenon, but here in the interior it is less seldom seen, and I believe each time it has been observed it was at this very spot—Death Creek."

"I've heard all this before," remarked the detective, "but between you and me, Young Klondike, it is an explanation which don't explain."

"Then how would you explain it?" asked Dick. "If you have some new theory for this mirage of Death Creek let's have it by all means."

"Haven't any, dear boy, but I know what the mirage is all right. Haven't I seen mirages on the desert of Sahara hundreds of times?"

"Don't know about that. I don't feel sure you ever were on the desert of Sahara."

"Come now, do you doubt my veracity? Then there's the mirage of the Mediterranean. I've seen that, and the mirage of—"

"That will do. Let's have your theory about the mirage of Death Creek."

"Tell you again I have no theory. Only thing is, as I understand the mirage, it don't make something out of nothing. It can and does show us distant points, usually reversed, and at other times raised above the horizon, as in this case; but when you

come to talk of making a city appear where there is no city, why, then——"

"Why, then, you believe that the mysterious mirage city of Death Creek is a real city?" broke in Young Klondike, with a laugh.

"I do; you may laugh as much as you like, but I do."

"And where is it, may I ask?"

"Give it up. That's something no fellow can find out."

"Pshaw! Nonsense! As though there could be any great city hidden in this wilderness."

"Remember, dear boy, that it is a wilderness, and no man yet has ever penetrated the country back of the headwaters of the Yukon."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried Young Klondike, cutting the Unknown short.

But after all the little detective was only giving out an idea which has been much discussed among some very sensible men. But let the explanation be what it may, the mirage city of Alaska is a well-known fact, and Young Klondike and his friends had been treated to a sight of it far inland, something as unusual as it is strange.

The mysterious city had entirely disappeared now, but the mist still hung in the valley and showed no sign of breaking, although it was quite clear overhead.

"We may as well make a start," said Ned. "I think it would be perfectly safe, and more than likely by the time we get to Bonanza creek we should find no fog at all."

"Look here," said the Unknown, "I don't want to hold you back, Young Klondike, but you know just as well as I do that such weather as this always means a storm."

"Pretty apt to," said Ned, "but what has that to do with our present situation?"

"It has just this to do with it; we won't get to the mine before dark in any case, and we may get caught in a blizzard before we can make it—is that so?"

"It's a chance always to happen this time of year."

"Exactly; now I say let's hold on here a couple of hours and cook up the remainder of that meat; by that time we shall be better able to judge what the weather is going to be, and if we should get nipped in a blizzard we shall have plenty to eat."

Nobody had any objection to offer to this plan, so they all returned to camp.

It was determined to roast part of the caribou meat and boil part, as this would save time; the remainder was to be packed away in snow to be used in feeding the dogs.

"I shall want a kettle of water here," remarked Edith; "who'll get it for me?"

"I'm your huckleberry," said the Unknown, catching up the pail and starting for the stream.

While he was gone Ned and Dick began cutting the meat still further, when all at once a loud shout was heard from the hole in the ice where the Unknown was scooping up the water in an old tin pan.

Ned and Dick ran to the spot.

"What's the row now?" called Young Klondike.

"What have you caught—a fish?"

"A fish! You bet it's a fish! A gold fish!" cried the Unknown.

"Hello! I never heard of any gold being found in Death Creek," said Ned, "and I know two or three fellows who have done a lot of prospecting here."

"Huh! Prospecting! More likely they did a lot of whisky drinking! Look at this!"

The Unknown put his hand down into the pan, and took out a ten ounce nugget.

"What do you call that?" he cried, holding it up.

"Any flies on that? Oh, I guess not! No, no!"

"It's a beauty, and no mistake!" said Dick. "Did you scoop that up out of the creek?"

"Yes, I did, and don't you forget it! As pretty a nugget as you ever laid your eyes on! Say, Young Klondike, I don't feel quite as anxious to move out of here as I was."

"Well, upon my word, neither do I," said Ned. "I'd like to try a few pans here. It must be mighty shallow for you to get hold of the nugget so."

"It is shallow. There ain't over a foot of water under the ice."

"Suppose you try it again."

"Just what I intend to do. Here goes, Young Klondike! Watch me do this thing some more."

The Unknown put his pan through the hole in the ice again and scraped up a lot of sand with the water.

Ned and Dick bent eagerly over to see what the result had been.

"Why, that sand is just full of flake gold!" cried Young Klondike, as the Unknown shook the water off.

"That's what it is. Did you ever see anything richer?"

"Can't say I did."

"Strange others should have looked here and not found it," mused Dick.

"I don't care a rap what others have done!" declared Ned. "There's gold in the pan—dead loads of it. What more do you want?"

"All there is in the creek."

"Ditto! Has this claim been located by anyone yet?"

"Not to my knowledge. I know there was a lot of talk about this section a while back, but I never heard of anyone actually locating here."

"Then it's free game for us?"

"I suppose it is. I can't say."

"We don't stay up at the Young Klondike long," remarked Dick. "It looks to me very much as though we had work to do here."

They kept on panning for about half an hour. Edith got tired of waiting for the water, and soon came down to see what it was all about.

The boys were able to surprise her with fully fifteen hundred dollars in flake gold and nuggets, taken out during those few moments.

Quick to come to a decision, Edith at once declared that they ought to remain where they were until they could learn more of this wonderful claim and not think of going on to the mine which bore Young Klondike's name that day.

Of course there was no dissenting voice to this decision, and a larger hole in the ice was cut and more digging done.

The result was truly amazing.

Nearly four thousand dollars were taken out before dark.

Still the fog hung heavy in the valley of the Klondike. It would hardly have been safe to travel even if they were so disposed.

Work closed with the going down of the sun.

Not that it is usually so in the Klondike country, quite the contrary. There is a deal of work done there in the dark part of the short winter days.

But Golden & Luckey were not prepared for such an emergency now, and it was therefore necessary to quit when the sun went down.

Then came the long evening in camp enlivened by Ned's banjo playing and Edith's singing, in addition to which the Unknown told some of his wonderful yarns, and altogether they had a jolly time.

The night passed quietly and when morning dawned the fog was thicker than ever.

"Another day of panning," cried Young Klondike, as he and the Unknown met outside the camp. "Strange this weather holds so long, but there's a storm brewing somewhere and we are certain to catch it before long."

They hurried down to the creek where Dick was already at work with a lantern doing the panning act as best he could.

"Any luck?" asked Ned.

"Great!" cried Dick. "Why, it's wonderful! I've got as much as three hundred dollars already, and I've only been at work a little while."

Ned took a hand in and met with the same astonishing luck.

Meanwhile, the Unknown cut away more ice so as to enlarge the chance at the bottom of the creek.

Ned tried it in a different place as soon as there was a chance, but here luck deserted him. Pan after pan was worked out with just no result at all.

"Reckon we'd better stick to the old spot," said the Unknown. "There don't seem to be much to be made here."

So Ned gave it up and went back to help Dick again.

While they were working that morning they found a four pound nugget, which fixed the character of the claim in Young Klondike's eyes.

"There is no doubt of its richness, Dick," he remarked. "We want to locate this place and start a Death Creek diggings going right away."

As Ned spoke he looked up and it seemed to him that on the other side of the creek, standing there in the mist, he could see the shadow of a man.

For an instant he watched it and the shadow moved

forward. In a moment more a man came out of the mist and stood staring at them.

He was an old gray-bearded fellow, shabby and half starved looking.

"Say, gents," he called out solemnly, "I don't want to have no muss with nobody, that hain't me, but I've come to warn you off this yer claim!"

CHAPTER III.

THE GOLD KING SAYS HE MEANS FIGHT.

THE sudden appearance of the old man, who came out of the mist, was more startling to Dick Luckey than to Ned, for the latter had seen the shadow and was prepared.

"Hello, neighbor! Who the mischief are you?" demanded the Unknown, who had seen him come also.

"We are respectable fellows, and no thieves—I want you to understand that."

"So you may be, so you may be," replied the old man. "I don't deny that none. It wouldn't become me to deny it, because why, I don't know you; but say, this yere is my claim."

"It is?" asked Ned.

"Yes, it is."

"Then come over here and tell us about it. I ask you again what is your name?"

"My name's Silas Rigby," drawled the queer old fellow. "I'm from Oshkosh, I am."

"Oshkosh, Wisconsin?"

"Yaas!"

"How long have you been here?"

"Oh, waal nigh on to a year. Say, I've seen you down to Dawson, hain't I? Seems to me I have, now I come to look."

"I think it very likely," replied Ned. "We are at Dawson a good deal."

"You're Young Klondike, hain't you? I hain't making no mistake when I say that?"

"That's what they call me, squire."

"Jes' so. Then this here t'other young feller must be Dick Luckey, and that little old cuss with the plug hat is the detective what you always carry round with you to keep you from being murdered for your wealth. Am I right or am I wrong?"

"I guess you are right in all but the detective part," laughed Ned. "No danger of my being murdered for my wealth."

"Well, I don't know about that. They do say as how you've dug out an all-fired lot of dust."

"Yes, but I don't carry it around in a bag with me."

"No? Waal, I s'pose not; but I'll come across the creek and see yer. I know you are a square man and won't swindle me out of my claim."

"You may be very sure we won't!" said Ned, emphatically. "If this claim is yours, Mr. Rigby, we

are going to respect your rights to the letter, but it bears no evidence of having been worked at all."

The old man came across the creek and looked at the nugget and the little pile of flake gold which Dick had washed out.

"You seem to be in luck," he said. "If the snow was off the ground you would see where I did a little panning myself, but not much, not much! I'm an old man, and this gold digging is hard work. Still, this here place is rich—thundering rich! It's as good a claim as there is on the Klondike, this little diggings of mine here on Death Creek."

"We've found it rich," replied Ned. "In fact, we took out over four thousand dollars yesterday afternoon."

"Sho! Did yer now! Waal, I want to know."

"Have you located this claim yet, neighbor?" demanded the Unknown, suddenly.

"Yes, I have located it," replied Rigby. "You'll find it on the Recorder's books down to Dawson all right, but I'm just about selling out to the Gold King—you know him?"

"You refer to Ralph Royston," said Ned.

"Yes, that's him. You know they call him the Gold King on account of his wonderful luck."

"His luck lies principally in jumping other people's claims," said the detective. "Look out for yourself, old man, he'll jump yours, first thing you know."

"I'd like to see him try it."

"Well, don't you fret; he will try it if he gets the chance."

"We want to know more of this," said Ned. "Where do you hang out, Mr. Rigby? Have you a camp about here?"

"Yes, I have; it's over on the next creek, where my principal digging was done before winter set in," replied the old prospector. "It isn't much of a place, boss, but such as it is it's my home, and you are welcome there any time."

"Do you live alone?"

"All alone."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Edith. "What a dreadful place to live in! Where do you get your supplies?"

"Well, Barney McGraw let's me have what I want, which isn't much. I was here a part of last winter and made out to live."

"You spoke of being on the point of making a deal with the Gold King. What do you mean by that?"

"Why, I mean just what I say. I'm expecting him here to-day or to-morrow. He's going to trade with me for a piece of property he owns up on El Dorado creek. He claims there's a thundering good chance there."

Ned looked at Dick and the Unknown looked at them both. All felt sorry for the old man.

"Go over to our camp and we'll give you some bacon and potatoes," said Ned, kindly. "I suppose they would't come amiss."

"Amis! I guess not! I'd be ever and ever so much obliged if you would," replied the old man joy-

fully, and he trotted off toward the camp, Ned shouting to Edith to let him have the promised supplies.

As soon as he was out of hearing a council of war was called.

"Look here," said Ned, "this is a pretty state of affairs. What's to be done?"

"Done! By the Jumping Jeremiah, the Gold King of Dawson must be downed!" cried the Unknown. "That's what's to be done, and we are the boys to do it—ahem!"

"Bet your life!" said Dick.

"I've been thinking of this for some time," mused Ned. "That man is doing positive injury to the good name of the Klondike."

This was entirely true.

Ralph Royston, otherwise known as the Gold King, was an Englishman who had appeared in Dawson about a year before.

He was supposed to be enormously rich, but there were many who doubted the stories of his vast wealth. He worked no mines himself; his scheme was to trade one claim for another, form stock companies, sell out and leave everyone in the lurch. Most of his stock was placed in England and the Canadian cities by agents with whom he was in constant correspondence.

He was too shrewd to swindle his neighbors in Dawson, but almost every mail brought letters from various parties inquiring as to the value of these stocks and the richness of the Gold King's various claims, all of which were either down-right swindles or had been sold out by the Gold King to others, who bought them purely for speculation.

Very frequently these claims, which had been heralded abroad with a great flourish of trumpets, never had a spade touched to them. Yet the Gold King was always trading for fresh ones. It made little difference to him whether they were rich or not.

Another pleasant custom of this man was to jump claims worked by poor and ignorant miners.

He would suddenly drop down upon a claim accompanied by a force of men—good fighters—whom he kept always in his employ, and take possession on the strength of some trumped-up excuse that the real owner had made a deal with him and traded the claim.

Appeal to the law was quite useless. The Gold King had plenty of money to defend the suit with, while he always took good care to pick out a victim who was without means to fight.

The only legitimate business he engaged in was the buying of gold dust for shipment to Canada and the States.

In this, what capital he actually had was invested, and as he very often managed to control the best part of the dust brought into Dawson City by small miners, he came to be known as the Gold King.

It is hardly necessary to say that Young Klondike despised the fellow, and never would sell him an ounce of dust. Consequently Ralph Royston hated Young Klondike, and they were enemies, although Royston

was a member of the new Mining Exchange, of which Ned Golden was the leading spirit as well as the founder. Unnecessary to say that the man never would have been allowed to join if Young Klondike had known what he was.

"Yes," added Ned, continuing on the same theme, "Ralph Royston has decidedly damaged the good name of the Klondike, and I think it is high time he was put down."

"And I, that this is a good chance to do it," said the detective.

"Right you are," said Dick. "Ned, let's bust right ahead and finish up the job."

They shook hands on it then.

It looked as though a bad day might be coming for the Gold King.

This was not the first time Young Klondike had undertaken to down men of his stamp, and in each instance he had succeeded.

It was now getting toward breakfast time, and all three returned to camp.

Mr. Rigby was packing up his bacon and potatoes, getting ready to start back to his own camp, but he readily accepted an invitation to breakfast.

Ned waited till they were all sitting quietly around drinking hot coffee, and then broached the subject of the Gold King again.

"What kind of a deal are you going to make with Mr. Royston?" he asked. "An even trade?"

"Why, there was some cash," replied Rigby, hesitatingly.

"How much?"

"A hundred dollars."

"Pshaw! That's nothing at all. What's the claim?"

"You mean the claim he is going to give me on El Dorado creek?"

"Yes."

"A thousand feet front on the creek, section 2, claim No. 98."

"What!" cried Ned. "Section 2 is nothing. Ever been there?"

"No."

"What does he represent it to be?"

"Good mining land. He showed me samples of gold which he claims were dug there."

"If he claims that any gold was ever dug there he lies horribly. It's all tundra land—swamp, you know."

"Dear me! Is it now?"

"That's what it is."

"Then I'm swindled."

"Not necessarily. You don't have to make the deal if the claim is no good."

"Why, I wanted ready money, you see, so I listened to him. My wife is sick back to home in Oshkosh, and I wanted to send her some cash."

"Ah! I see! You have taken the cash already?"

"Yes."

"More fool you."

"I suppose the trade will have to stand," said the

old man dolefully. "Yes, I was a fool to talk of trading a claim I knew about for one I never saw, but I suppose it can't be helped now."

"Yes, it can."

"How?"

"I'll make a deal with you for these Death Creek diggings, and you can give the Gold King back his money."

"I'd be very grateful to you if you'd help me, boss."

"I'll do it," said Ned. "Just give me a moment to talk it over with my partners, and I'll offer you a deal which will amount to something."

Silas Rigby assented, and our friends stepped outside the shelter and talked together for a few moments.

Returning then, Ned offered the old man a good claim on El Dorado creek near his own mine, which had proved one of the most successful camps in the country.

"I've opened it up a little and I know there's gold on it," he said. "I'll give you a deed of it and six thousand dollars cash, you to relinquish all claim on any gold we have dug on your land here in the last two days."

"I'll do it!" cried old Rigby, his eyes sparkling. "Young Klondike, you're white, that's what you are. I shall never forget this."

"Of course you understand that to a certain extent this is paying you with your own money," said Ned. "We have taken out over four thousand from the creek."

"That makes no difference," declared Rigby. "I might never have found the gold you panned out—probably never would have found it, and anyhow I should have gone on with my trade with the Gold King, so the money is all right."

"You are satisfied?" asked Dick; "we want you to feel so."

"More than satisfied," replied Rigby. "I'll make the deal. When do I get the cash?"

"You can take the gold now," said Ned. "I'll pay you the remaining two thousand first time you come to Dawson."

"But I never go to Dawson."

"Very well, then I'll pay you first time I come up to the Young Klondike mine after you get located there, which will be soon, I hope, and if I don't come myself I'll send it first opportunity. I'll give you a hundred dollars of it now in Canadian notes, so that you can settle with Ralph Royston when he comes."

The money and dust were then handed over to old Rigby, and Young Klondike drew up a contract which covered the deal, which was duly signed.

The deal was scarcely completed when shouts were heard coming from the direction of the river.

"Someone coming!" cried the Unknown, springing up.

They all ran out of the hut. The fog had cleared away and the sun was just rising.

The shouts continued; they could hear the crackling of whips, dog teams were coming beyond a doubt.

"It's the Gold King!" cried old Rigby. "He's making for my place."

They hurried down to the river and saw three dog sleds carrying some eight or ten men coming up over the frozen Klondike.

The man who drove the foremost sled was a well-known French dog driver, who had often worked for Young Klondike. Seated behind wrapped in furs was a larger man wearing a big cowboy hat, his head tied up in a muffler and his bulky form concealed by a heavy bearskin coat.

"That's the Gold King," cried the Unknown, promptly. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, boys, we did not make our Death Creek deal one moment too soon."

"That's what's the matter," replied Ned. "Mr. Rigby, you'd better get back to your hut. Where is it?"

"Just over the hill on the other creek."

"Good enough. We'll be there as soon as you."

"I wish you would. I'm afraid of that man."

"Pshaw!" cried the detective; "he's only a big bluffer. Leave him to me. I'll down him, never you fear."

Rigby hurriedly crossed the creek and disappeared over the hill, Young Klondike and his party following more slowly.

They kept in among the trees as much as possible, as it was the Unknown's idea that they could best handle the Gold King by coming upon him suddenly.

But they were able to watch the progress of the dog team, and they saw them turn into the mouth of the next creek, on the bank of which stood a rude hut.

Most of the men remained with the dogs, unharnessing them and feeding them. The Gold King and two others walked up the bank and entered the hut.

"Now is our chance, boys," said the detective. "We'll sneak around the other way."

It was easy to do this by keeping in the woods, and inside of a few moments they were behind the hut, having gained that position without being seen by any of the new-comers.

Loud voices could be heard inside the hut. Ralph Royston's voice was particularly loud—Young Klondike knew it of old.

"This don't stand!" he shouted. "I won't take the money. When I make a deal I make it. There's no back out to me."

"But the deal has not been completed, Mr. Royston," old Rigby said, mildly. "I don't want to make it now. I've changed my mind."

"It makes no difference. The deal is made and it has got to go through."

"I can't make it. Here's your money."

Ned was peering through a crevice between the logs, and he saw Ralph Royston strike the old man's outstretched hand, and send the bills flying all over the floor.

"That for your money, you old scoundrel!" he

shouted. "I mean fight! The Death Creek diggings shall be mine!"

Ned stepped around in front of the hut and planted himself in the open doorway, exclaiming:

"You are wrong, Ralph Royston! I've just made a deal for the Death Creek diggings—they are mine!"

CHAPTER IV.

DRIVEN AWAY.

"WHAT'S this! What's this! You, Young Klondike! You here to interfere with my deal?"

Ralph Royston turned upon Ned and began to bluster, but he had to meet an antagonist who was perfectly cool.

"Now, then, none of that blow and brag, Ralph Royston!" cried the Unknown. "You know Golden & Luckey! We are the firm! Death Creek is ours—and we don't want to sell—see?"

"Hold your noise, you absurd little runt!" snapped Royston. "I'll deal with Young Klondike, not with you."

"Who are you calling a little runt?" roared the Unknown. "Look out for yourself! I'll have my revenge! I can lick two of you, big as you are! You would swindle this poor man, would you? I—I——"

"Stop! Stop!" exclaimed Ned, as he and Dick seized the irate detective and pulled him away. "We don't want any fighting. Mr. Royston, I have just purchased this property. I shall be happy to sell for cash if you want to buy."

The Gold King saw that it was a good time to cool down. The first thing he had to do was to learn how matters actually stood.

"I wasn't aware that I had to deal with the highly respectable firm of Golden & Luckey," he said, sarcastically. "I labored under the impression that Death Creek belonged to me by right of purchase, and I think still that I have made no mistake."

"Now come, Royston," replied Ned, "you know as well as I do that this deal of yours is in direct violation of the rules of the Mining Exchange."

"I'd like to have you explain yourself, sir. Am I accused of fraud?"

"You decidedly are. The claim you talk of giving Mr. Rigby in exchange for Death Creek is absolutely worthless, as you know very well."

"It's nothing of the sort, sir! I'll have you understand that there are others besides Young Klondike who are able to judge of the value of a mine."

"We don't mine gold in a tundra swamp."

"Who says it's a tundra swamp?"

"I say it boldly and you know it."

"Then I say you lie!" bawled the Gold King, and he drew off and struck at Ned.

This was enough!

A free fight was on in an instant.

Ned gave the Gold King a good one between the eyes, which sent him sprawling on his back.

His companions instantly made a rush to his assistance, but only to run against Dick and the Unknown.

Dick downed one like a shot, and the little detective picked up the other bodily and threw him out on the snow.

It was all done as quick as lightning, and poor old Silas Rigby stood staring with his mouth wide open, hardly knowing what to make of such a state of affairs in his quiet hut.

"Quick!" exclaimed the Unknown. "We've got to light out, or the whole gang will be on top of us before we know where we are at!"

"Get up!" said Ned, sternly. "Get up, Ralph Royston, and leave this house!"

The Gold King staggered to his feet, and made for the door without speaking a word.

But he did not get out, for Ned blocked the way.

"Wait a minute!" he exclaimed, whipping out his revolver. "No, don't draw on me! It won't pay you! There! That's better! You see I've got the drop on you, but I'm not the man to shoot unless I have to. Rigby, pick up that money and give it to Royston, to whom it belongs."

"I won't take it!" said the Gold King, hoarsely. "No, I won't!"

"You'd better!"

"I say I won't! I'll have the law on you, Ned Golden! This is criminal business, this is."

"Decidedly it is. If you won't take the money, then go."

He stood aside and motioned Royston out through the door, an invitation which the Gold King lost no time in availing himself of.

"Look out, Young Klondike!" he hissed. "The end is not yet. You shall hear from me again!"

He walked loftily toward the bank, but before he had covered half the distance the men came running up.

They were armed with rifles and looked fierce.

"Take those persons prisoners!" shouted Royston. "Shoot them if they resist! They are trespassers on this land!"

But Young Klondike had no disposition to want to be shot. Already he had ordered the retreat.

"Come with us, Rigby," he said. "We'll get back to the other camp, harness up and start for Dawson City. They'll never dare to shoot us on the move."

They ran through the woods, crossed the creek, and were at their camp in a few moments.

They were not followed.

Ralph Royston had entirely too much at stake to go to the length of deliberate murder.

No time was lost in harnessing the dogs.

"Dawson City is the place to settle this business," declared Ned. "Our trip to El Dorado creek is off the programme now."

They hurriedly boarded the sleds and Ned led off with a crack of his whip, which sent the dogs flying down the frozen creek.

"Look out for them when we pass the mouth of the other creek," said Edith; "they'll be sure to attack us there if they mean to do it at all."

"I'm awake!" cried the Unknown, from the other sled. "Get your rifle ready, Edith."

"No killing!" said Ned, emphatically. "Don't fire unless you have to—do you hear, Zed?"

"I hear, my lord, and to hear is to obey!" called the Unknown, "but all the same if they get too funny let them look out for squalls."

In a moment they were opposite the mouth of the other creek, and the sharp cracks of several rifles were heard.

But the shots flew wide, and the Gold King's party took good care to keep themselves concealed among the trees.

Edith and Dick fired a few high shots just to let them see that they were ready for them in case they "got too fresh," as the detective expressed it.

The shots had the desired effect, for the enemy ceased firing at once, and not showing themselves there was no necessity of wasting a moment.

"Good-by! We're off for Dawson!" shouted Young Klondike. "If you want to see me, Ralph Royston, I'll meet you on the Mining Exchange."

Whether the Gold King accepted the challenge or not it was impossible to say, for he did not show himself nor did any of his men.

So Young Klondike cracked his whip and the dogs went swinging around upon the river, and the sleds went whirling away.

CHAPTER V.

EXPULSED FROM THE EXCHANGE.

"GOOD-MORNING, Mr. Golden—good-morning, sir. Hope I see you well!"

Half a dozen of the most prominent mining men in Dawson City crowded around Ned Golden and Dick Luckey when in company with the Unknown they came upon the floor of the Mining Exchange the second morning following the affair at Death Creek.

Ned answered those greetings heartily, as he always did, and there was a general hand-shaking all around.

"Has Mr. McCullagh arrived yet?" he asked of the doorkeeper, as soon as he got a chance to speak.

"Not yet, sir," replied the man, "but I am expecting him every moment."

"Was Mr. Royston on the floor yesterday?"

"No, sir, he was not. I don't think Mr. Royston is in town."

"Why, yes, he is," said a prominent broker, a great friend of Ned's. "I saw Ralph Royston on the street late last night. He said he had just come down from up the river."

"Exactly," said Ned. "And did he say anything about me?"

"Well, now he did."

"What was it, Brooks? Speak it right out."

"He's terribly down on you, Ned. He said you tried to kill him up on Death Creek."

"Do you think that is likely, Brooks?"

"Not at all. It would take a lot to make me believe it."

"Just so. The case is exactly the other way. Ralph Royston is a scoundrel."

"I don't need to be told that."

"He tried to swindle a poor old prospector named Rigby out of a valuable claim, and I stepped in between them. Royston called me a liar and I promptly knocked him down."

"And quite right. I'd have done the same myself."

"I'm sure you'll say so, Brooks, when you hear the facts."

And Young Klondike went over the whole story. He had almost finished when Mr. McCullagh, the president of the Exchange, came in.

"Hello! You back, Golden!" he exclaimed. "I thought you were off for El Dorado creek."

"I thought I was myself," replied Ned, "but I changed my mind. McCullagh, I've got a complaint to make against one of the members of our honorable body, and I shall ask that he be expelled under the rules."

"Hello! Who's this?"

"Ralph Royston, the Gold King!"

"I'm not surprised. He ought to have been expelled long ago. I was about to propose it myself, but he has some few friends on the floor, so I hung back."

"Well, there must be no hanging back now," spoke up Dick. "Ralph Royston is not a fit man to be a member of the Exchange."

"We'll settle him," said McCullagh, and he mounted the platform and called the members to order, announcing as soon as the usual opening ceremonies were over, that Young Klondike had something to say.

Ned went up on the platform, and in a quiet manly way told his story of the Death Creek affair.

He was still at it when Ralph Royston came swaggering in.

Black looks greeted him on all sides.

The man's general character was well known. He had but few friends on the Dawson City Exchange before Young Klondike started in to tell his story, and he had fewer still now.

He did not attempt to interrupt Ned, for he well knew that to do so would lead to his immediately being put off the floor, but when Young Klondike put the motion to expel him he sprang to his feet and made a long rambling speech, defending himself from the charges in a way which certainly did not help matters much.

The vote was then put by Mr. McCullagh.

There were only three dissenting voices.

The Gold King had been expelled from the Exchange.

"You will leave the floor, Mr. Royston," said President McCullagh.

"Never!" cried the Gold King, losing all control of himself as he sprang to his feet.

"This is an outrage! It's illegal! I can prove my entire innocence of these charges. I bought the Death Creek diggings fair and square! I demand a re-hearing, I—"

He got no further. Any member has a right to put a non-member off the floor of the Dawson City Exchange.

The Unknown could not resist the temptation to assert this right.

He sprang to his feet, at the same time motioning to Dick to join him, and each seized the Gold King by an arm.

"Let go of me! Let go! I demand justice!" roared Royston.

"You've had it," said Ned, who had come down off the platform. "Out with him! He has no longer any rights here."

Dick and the Unknown hustled him then, but he held back and struggled for all he was worth.

"You have no right to interfere with me!" shouted the Gold King, shaking his fist at Young Klondike as Dick and the Unknown started to drag him off the floor.

"Off with him! He has broken the rules!" said Young Klondike. "He is no longer a member of the Dawson City Mining Exchange."

For a moment it looked as if there might be some shooting done, for a few who were still friendly to the fellow now rushed forward and tried to interfere.

But President McCullagh rapped for order and got it, and Dick and the Unknown hustled the Gold King out without further ceremony.

He did not attempt to return, but went away breathing threats of vengeance against Golden & Luckey and all their friends.

"That fellow means a muss," said the Unknown, when our three friends left the Exchange together a little later on.

"Let him try it," replied Ned, quietly. "I'm ready for him any time."

"What's the programme?" asked Dick. "We've got the Death Creek diggings, now what are we going to do with them?"

"What do you propose?"

"Why, I was thinking that perhaps the best thing would be to sell them out. We've got mines enough, dear knows, and to try to work this in winter might—"

"It won't do, Dick," interrupted Ned. "My mind is made up to work it. If you object and don't care to have it made a firm matter, I'll buy out your share—all your shares, if necessary—and work it alone."

"You don't buy mine if you mean to work it," said Dick, emphatically; "that's flat."

"Same here," said the Unknown. "By the Jump—"

ing Jeremiah, I think I see myself letting you go up there alone with a lot of men who may or may not be in the pay of the Gold King."

"I thought you'd say so," replied Ned, "and I am glad you have. I wouldn't desert you and I know very well you wouldn't desert me, but the Death Creek diggings are going to be worked all the same; it is my intention to go up there at once."

"To-night?" laughed the detective.

"No; not to-night nor to-morrow night, but I do hope to get things in shape to start by the end of the week."

"That will give us time to arm ourselves," said Dick. "I hope you mean to take men enough up there to make it safe."

"I was thinking of twenty-five. How would that strike you?"

"We can do a good deal of tall fighting with twenty-five men if they amount to anything."

"We must see to it that they do. I think I'll go down the street and engage them now."

It must be understood that engaging workmen to do winter mining was by no means an easy matter at the time we write of Dawson City, whatever it may be now.

Men then did not care to work for wages however large when they could dig gold on their own account.

Ten dollars a day was an ordinary price of labor, but as it happened there was none to be had that day even at the high price named.

Not that there was nobody in Dawson City out of work, there were plenty in that situation, but Young Klondike was unable with all his wealth—and he offered as high as twenty-five dollars a day—to find more than three men who cared to engage to accompany him to Death Creek.

"I believe it's the name that scares them, Dick," he said. "I actually believe it's the name."

They had been to every prominent saloon and gambling house then, and had been turned away disappointed from them all.

"It can't be that," replied Dick. "There are some superstitious ones among them, of course, but I don't believe they are all such fools."

"It's the Gold King, that's what it is," declared the Unknown. "He has been the rounds before you and don't you forget it. I believe he has bribed half these fellows to refuse to work for us."

Young Klondike thought so, too, and he felt sure of it later, for his friend Brooks came to him with the story that Royston was openly boasting that he had hired all the labor in Dawson City, and intended to open up an old claim a short distance up the Klondike, for the express purpose of preventing Ned from getting men to work his claim in Death Creek.

"Never mind," said Ned that night at the hotel. "We'll get the best of him somehow—you'll see."

Next day Young Klondike went straight ahead just as though he had all the men he wanted, which was safe enough, for if worse came to worse he could bring men down from the great El Dorado creek dig-

gings, where he had a large number constantly employed.

Two portable houses were purchased, comfortable three room affairs, which could be put up right on top of the snow when spring came and rebuilt on proper foundations.

Then mining tools of all kinds were purchased, and a large stock of provisions laid in, and the whole sent up to Death Creek with the three men already engaged, under the charge of old Silas Rigby, who had concluded not to attempt to visit his El Dorado creek purchase until spring opened, but to put in the winter working for Golden & Luckey on Death Creek.

"You're a good bluffer, Ned," said the Unknown, one morning toward the end of the week. "Anyone would suppose you had all the men you needed, from the way you are going on."

"Just what I want them to suppose, and I expect to have them before to-morrow night."

"How? Where will you get them?"

"Never you mind. I'm going to surprise you. I've heard of a chance, and if it don't work I know of another. I can bluff as well as Ralph Royston—he'll see."

"Better tell," said the detective. "There's no use in keeping secrets from an old friend like me."

But Ned only laughed and left him.

On his way down the street he met the Gold King driving his dog team, which was headed for the river.

He shook his fist at Ned as he flew past, shouting:

"Hello there, Young Klondike! Do you see that fist? Look at it! It's going to down you! I'll get square with the man who had me expelled from the Exchange."

CHAPTER VI.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

Now as the Gold King was heading for the river, anyone would have been quite justified in supposing that he was bound for the new diggings he had just started up the Klondike.

Perhaps he was, but just the same he stopped at a well-known saloon down by the levee, and driving his dogs in under a shed went in through the bar-room door himself.

An hour passed and he had not come out, but any number of people had gone in.

Among others was the Unknown, and it happened this way.

Shortly after Ned left him the Unknown strolled down the street as far as the levee, and there he spied the Gold King's dog team under the shed.

He looked hard at it for a moment, and then muttered: "That's Royston's," but he made sure by asking the man who had charge of the shed, and learned that he was right.

The Unknown pulled off his plug hat and put it on again—something he always did when he was trying to think.

"Shall I do it, or shall I mind my own business?" he muttered. "Ned has taken a very independent stand in this Death Creek deal. Perhaps he'd rather I wouldn't interfere."

He pondered a moment, and then walked off down the levee, entering a small clothing store, kept by one Simon Simson, a gentleman whom the Unknown very well knew.

"Hello, Simon; how are you feeling this morning?" asked the detective, as he closed the door and walked up to the counter. "Cold, is it not? By the Jumping Jeremiah, my ears are almost frozen!"

"It's schust so cold as nefer vas," replied Simon. "I should tink your ears would be frozen stiff to your head already mit dat high hat. Vy not led me sell you a nice varm cap. I've got dem very scheep?"

"Just what you can do for me, Simon," replied the Unknown. "I want a cap and an overcoat, and a false beard and a wig—you know."

"Ha! You vas on de detective racket again?"

"A little."

"Den I make poor peezees with you. De vig and de beard you own already, and it's to borrow de hat and de overcoat you vant, I suppose."

"Well, I won't be quite so hard on you as that, Simon," laughed the detective. "I know I've borrowed costumes from you before, but I've paid you well for them, you old rascal. This time I'll be liberal and buy them outright, but I shall probably want to leave them here when I get through with the business I'm working on now."

Simon Simson agreed to all this readily enough, and when the Unknown left the shop his own mother might have been doubtful of his identity, the little man's appearance was so completely changed.

"Now to see what friend Royston is about," muttered the detective. "If you want to down a man there is nothing like learning his habits, and I have sworn to down the Gold King."

He found friend Royston about to take a drink.

The Gold King was standing before the bar surrounded by a little crowd of admiring satellites; they were all half seas over and were talking noisily as the Unknown elbowed his way to the bar, taking his stand as near to them as possible.

The Gold King was boasting of his rich claims, and of the money he had made. The Unknown listened patiently for ten or fifteen minutes, hoping to hear Young Klondike's name mentioned.

At last he was rewarded, for Royston turned to a roughly-dressed fellow who had been hanging close at his elbow, and whispered:

"Say, Billy, I'm going to be detained here; you'd better get along and attend to that matter. We want to spring the trap on Young Klondike to-day, sure."

This was somewhat startling. The Unknown listened eagerly, hoping that more would be said.

But there was not. Billy immediately left the

saloon, and the Gold King turned his attention to the bottle and his friends.

The Unknown waited a little longer, but Young Klondike's name did not come up again, and he concluded that the best thing he could do was to look after Billy, besides which he felt that Ned should immediately be informed of what had occurred.

Two surprises were in store for the Unknown when he left the saloon.

The dog team was gone from under the shed.

Inquiry developed the interesting fact that Billy had taken it and driven off up the Klondike.

This made the Unknown decidedly nervous, and he hurried back to the hotel, only to find that Ned and Dick had taken their dog team and driven up the Klondike, too.

The Unknown immediately went up to Edith's room and was immensely disappointed to find her out.

The clerk told him when he came down into the office that Edith had gone out calling on friends, but the Unknown met her on the street a few moments later.

"Where are Ned and Dick?" he demanded hurriedly.

"Why, they've gone up to Wilson's Creek to look for men," replied Edith. "Didn't you know?"

"Gone into trouble!" exclaimed the detective. "That's where they've gone. Edith, I greatly fear that Ned and Dick have walked deliberately into a trap."

Now whatever the Unknown may have thought about the matter, certain it is that Ned and Dick never suspected anything wrong.

"How did you get this tip about the men upon Wilson's Creek, Ned?" Dick inquired, as they went flying over the ice.

"Why 'Ran Davis told me on the street last night that the Wilson's Creek mine was going to shut down," replied Ned. "Of course I knew there would be a lot of idle men on their way to Dawson as soon as that took place, so I thought the best thing we could do would be to run right up there and head them off."

"Wonder why they close?" mused Dick.

"Give it up. Wilson's Creek belonged to the Gold King once, but I heard he'd traded it off for a lot of claims away up the river. It is the only really good mine he ever owned."

"Don't you think it more than likely it has come back into his hands again, and that he's trying the same old game to close up the mine and run the stock down so that he can buy it in for a low figure?"

"Well, I wouldn't wonder. It might be so, but even if it is what's to hinder us from freezing on to these men?"

"Nothing in the world. Of course we want the men, and having started in to down this scoundrel, we want to strike him wherever and whenever we get a chance."

It was only about six miles to Wilson's Creek.

When Ned left the hotel he fully expected to be back before dark.

Indeed, his plan was to send two or three dog teams right up to take the men on to Death Creek, in case he was fortunate enough to engage them.

As to any trouble coming out of this hurried run to the Wilson's Creek mine, such an idea never once entered Young Klondike's head.

Soon they turned off from the frozen river and entered a dark, narrow gorge.

Through this gorge a creek went tumbling in the summer time, but now, of course, all was frozen and silent. The ice was so slippery that the dogs could scarcely keep their footing, as Young Klondike urged them on toward a small frame building which could be indistinctly seen on the heights above them. This was the shaft house of the famous Wilson's Creek mine.

"Hello! Hello, up there! Hello!" shouted Ned, as they neared the shaft house.

There was no answer.

The place seemed to be completely deserted.

When Ned rounded up before the shaft house a few moments later he began to wonder if some trick had not been played on him, for it certainly seemed that there was no one at the mine.

The shaft house was closed, and the snow had drifted against the outbuildings. Still there were footprints in front of the door, which showed conclusively that someone had been there since the last snow storm, which was more than a week before.

"There's nobody here, Dick," said Ned. "'Ran Davis has been playing it on me. I've been fooled as sure as fate."

"I declare it looks so," replied Dick. "All the same, we don't want to give it up without a try."

"Certainly not," said Ned, throwing aside the big bearskin robe and springing off the sled.

He tried the door and found it open.

"It's all right, Dick!" he shouted, as he pushed his way inside.

"What's up?" called Dick.

"Look here!"

Ned came to the door, holding in his hand a piece of paper.

"This was pinned to the table," he explained.

"The men are all at the upper mine."

"Does it say so?"

"Yes. 'All hands at the upper mine'—that's the way it reads."

"Good enough. But where is the upper mine? I never heard of it."

"Nor I."

"Didn't know there was two, and can't hardly believe it now."

"I don't see why you should hesitate to believe it. You know no more about the Wilson's Creek diggings than I do, and that is just nothing at all."

"Ned, I don't know why I can't believe it, but some thing tells me that this is a trap set for us by the Gold King."

It was strange that Dick should say it in the light of what happened later, but Ned laughed heartily at what he called his partner's absurd suspicion then.

"Pshaw! if there's another shaft house further up the creek I'm going there," he declared. "We'll leave the dogs right here and push ahead on foot."

Dick offered no objection.

He had said his say, and had not the least intention of hanging back if Ned was determined to push on.

So they unharnessed the dogs and shut them up in the shaft house, after which they pushed on up the gorge, which soon became so rough that it would have been quite impossible to have gone on with the sled.

After many windings they came in sight of a lonely hut built on a rock which overhung the gorge.

There had been digging done here, a good deal of it. There were great piles of earth half buried in snow lying close to the bank of the creek.

The boys climbed up over the rocks and approached the hut.

As they drew near a man came out and called to them, but Ned could not understand what he said.

"There! What did I tell you?" he said to Dick, triumphantly. "Your imagination has led you astray, my dear boy."

"Don't you fret about that," laughed Dick. "I'm only too glad to find it so. Hello there, neighbor! Hello!"

"Hello!" answered the man on the rocks. "What do you want up here?"

"Is this the Wilson's Creek mine?" called Ned.

"It's the upper mine; yes."

"Are you the superintendent?"

"No. He's inside. We are about closing up here and worked late last night. Mr. Rowan is asleep."

"You see I was right," said Ned, as they climbed on.

The man met them at the door.

He was decidedly a hard-looking customer, but a man may look rough and still be honest. Young Klondike had no suspicion yet.

He told his name and explained his business.

"Why, it's all right," said the man. "We shall only be too glad to go to work for you, boss."

"How many men are there here?" inquired Ned.

"There's twelve of us," was the reply. "All hands are off hunting except Mr. Rowan, and he's asleep, as I told you. You see, we've run out of provisions, and so the boys thought they'd go up the mountains and see if they couldn't shoot a few rabbits. They'll be back before long."

"Can I see Mr. Rowan?" asked Ned.

"Certainly you can. I'll go in and wake him up."

The man opened a door and passed through to an inner room.

"You see now how absurd your suspicions are, Dick," said Ned. "Everything is as straight as a string here."

"Drop it," said Dick. "I declare I'll never suspect again as long as I live, all the same I——"

"Come right in, gents!" called the man, opening the door part way. "Mr. Rowan will see you soon."

Unsuspectingly Ned and Dick passed through the door, which was instantly closed.

Then suddenly a sharp cry was heard and a moment later the man popped out through the door and ran off down the gorge.

The moments passed—they lengthened into hours; it began to grow dark.

The silence of death hung over that lonely mountain hut.

But Young Klondike and Dick Luckey did not come out through the door.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MIDNIGHT ESCAPE.

WHAT had happened to Ned and Dick?

Something very serious, of course.

It was so serious that they now lay prisoners in a dark cave under the mountain hut.

The cave was a small affair, and the mouth of it opened off from a slight depression in the rocks over which the hut had been built.

That Dick was entirely right in his suspicions, Ned knew only too well.

When they passed through the door they found the interior room quite dark, a bearskin having been hung over the window to make it so.

"Right ahead!" growled the man, at the door.

"This way, gents!" called a voice from the other end of the room.

That was the time it happened.

Unsuspectingly Ned and Dick walked on.

All in an instant the floor dropped from under them; down they went into the cellar, and the trap-door closed above their heads.

"Quick, Skit! Get down the mountain, and wait for the boss!" said a man, coming out of a dark corner of the room.

If the Unknown had been there then he would have recognized him as the man to whom the Gold King had spoken in the saloon.

"Don't you want help?" asked Skit. "They may show fight, you know."

"Not a bit of it. I can manage them. They can't get out, that's one thing sure, so I shall just take my time about going down."

Skit waited for nothing more, but ran out of the house and hurried down the gorge, as we have said.

The man then removed the bearskin from the window, lit his pipe and sat down to smoke.

He seemed to be in no hurry to go down into the cellar. In fact he had no intention of going there at all for the present, for as he said to Skit there was no possible way of his prisoners getting out until he chose to open the trap door, at least so far as he knew.

Meanwhile, Ned and Dick, who were not hurt a bit, for the fall was less than ten feet, were wandering about in the cave which opened off the cellar.

It was entirely dark, but the boys were well supplied with matches, and they had been able to explore their narrow quarters thoroughly enough to make it plain to them that there was no chance of escape.

Ned was terribly chagrined.

"Dick, I ought to be kicked," he declared, "and upon my word I wish you'd undertake the job. It really is all my fault that this thing has come upon us. In spite of your warning, deliberately and with my eyes wide open, I walked into this trap."

"Set by Ralph Royston for our special benefit. I suppose you are willing to admit that now, Ned?"

"I don't see how I can deny it. I've been a fool."

"What is to be done? We've called and called and can't get any answer. I begin to think that there is nobody in the hut now."

"Looks so. We shall hear from some of them soon enough, though, you may depend upon that."

"The worst of it is neither Edith or the Unknown know where we are, and I don't see how there is any chance of their finding out."

"And 'Ran Davis? What about him?"

"'Ran is a traitor and in the pay of the Gold King, of course. If I ever get back to Dawson alive he'll hear from me. Oh, how I wish I had told the Unknown my plans!"

It would have been fortunate if he had, and it was equally fortunate that the Unknown was the sort of man who knew how to act on his own account.

The detective's suspicion had been more than confirmed, and as soon as he found out that Ned and Dick had gone up the river, he told Edith all he knew.

"We must follow them of course," declared Edith, "and we must not lose a moment in doing it. It's surely a plot of the Gold King's, Zed."

"I am absolutely certain of it," replied the detective.

"What would you advise?"

"That you get a dog team ready and wait for me at Brown's Hotel, near the levee. You know Mrs. Brown; she will accommodate you, I'm sure. You can tell her just what has occurred."

"And you?"

"I'll go back to the saloon, resume my disguise, and watch the Gold King. If, as we suspect, Ned and Dick have been led into a trap, he will be sure to go to them before night. We follow him—that's all."

This plan was carried out.

Edith waited at Brown's until after one o'clock, when the Unknown suddenly put in an appearance.

"He has started!" he exclaimed, as soon as he came into the room where Edith was sitting. "He has gone up the Klondike with his dog team alone with one man."

"Do you know the man?"

"It's 'Ran Davis."

"One of Ned's particular friends."

"Don't you believe it, my dear! 'Ran Davis is a friend to nobody but himself. I see it all now. He has betrayed the boys into the hands of the Gold King."

And indeed it looked very much as if the Unknown was right, for at that moment Ralph Royston and this man were skimming over the ice in the dog sled, heading for Wilson's Creek.

When they had covered about a mile Davis, chancing to look back, saw another sled coming on behind them at a rapid rate.

It was now growing dark and he was not able to see it very distinctly; even if he had it is doubtful if at that distance he could have made out its occupants.

They were Edith and the Unknown.

Thus friends and enemies were both on their way to Young Klondike's prison, but, of course, the boys could not know that.

Since the moment of their fall into the cellar they had seen no one, nor had they heard a sound.

"It must be dark outside now as well as in here," Dick remarked, as they sat together on a stone just inside the cave.

"I expect it is," replied Ned. "Oh, Dick, this is disgusting! If we could only do something! It's this sitting here idle waiting for the worst to happen that drives me mad."

"I tell you one thing we might do that we haven't done," said Dick, "and that is to sound the walls of the cave all around."

"A big contract, and not a very profitable undertaking."

"I'm not so sure of that. These caves are seldom so small as this; the one we are in may connect with another; don't you think there is a chance?"

"Why, there's certainly a chance; still, I don't think it is very likely; from what we have seen with the matches all there is to the cave is right here."

"Shall we try it or shan't we? I don't care if you think it is no use."

"Oh, I suppose we may as well. It will serve to pass the time away anyhow. Where shall we begin?"

"Right here on this side"

"Suppose you take one side and I'll try the other; there is no use in both of us chasing the same dog."

It was so agreed and the boys, arming themselves with stones, set out to sound the walls of the cave.

Ned had not advanced far before he heard Dick give a sudden exclamation. Then he called: "Come here, Ned! Come here!"

"Hello!" cried Ned. "What have you found?"

"It's hollow here."

"That's what we want. Where are you, anyhow? I can't see a thing."

"Light a match"

"I'm doing it. Ah! There you are. Now about this hollow place; I think——"

"Hush!" breathed Dick. "What was that?"

Ned heard nothing, but Dick had his ear to the wall of the cave.

"I heard somebody laugh," he declared. "Yes, and there are people talking behind here. Listen, Ned! You can hear them for yourself."

Ned clapped his ear to the wall and declared that he could.

"There are certainly people talking there," he said. "Oh, I wish I could hear what they are saying. You were quite right, Dick; there must be another cave behind this."

"I was sure of it," said Dick. "What's to be done? They are much more likely to be our enemies than our friends."

There was nothing to be done then, for at that very moment a sound from the cellar drew the attention of both boys that way.

"They are opening the trap-door!" breathed Dick.

It was so. A light flashed into the cave, and as the boys ran out into the cellar, they saw that a ladder had been let down from above, and two men were descending.

"'Ran Davis and the Gold King!" gasped Ned, whipping out his revolver.

He was too late.

The Gold King and Young Klondike's treacherous friend had already drawn their weapons, and in a twinkling Ned and Dick were covered.

"Hands up, boys!" cried Royston. "I don't want to shoot you, but I will unless you drop that shooting-iron now!"

There was no help for it.

Ned flung the revolver into a corner and reluctantly raised his hands.

"So we have you to thank for this, Ralph Royston," he said. "I thought as much from the first, and it seems I wasn't wrong."

"On the contrary, you were dead right, Young Klondike. So this is the way you down the Gold King, is it? Seems to me your fine schemes don't pan out very well. Disarm them, 'Ran. Now is the time to do it, and remember this, young gents, the first fellow who makes a move against my friend Davis, is going to get shot dead."

"If 'Ran Davis is as good a friend to you as he has been to me, you'll find him a dandy," replied Ned, bitterly.

"That's all right, 'Golden, give up your guns!" growled the fellow. "I'm working for Davis, and don't you forget it. Money talks every time."

"In other words you have sold me out," said Ned.

"That's about the size of it, and for a blame good price, too, and don't you forget that, either, my boy."

Was anything more than this necessary to show Young Klondike how thoroughly mistaken he had been in this false friend?

Ned was silent as he gave up his arms, but Dick could not restrain himself.

He broke out and abused 'Ran Davis in good round terms.

"Shut your mouth or I'll break it!" snarled Davis. "Boss, have I got to submit to such abuse as this?" "Take him up the ladder," said the Gold King. "You know our plan; we don't want him here. I've come to deal with Young Klondike, and I propose to deal with him alone."

Ned kept quiet, but resolved that if any attempt was made to separate him from Dick, he would fight even against the greatest odds.

The time came instantly, for Davis ordered Dick to ascend the ladder, presenting a cocked revolver at his head.

"No, you don't, 'Ran Davis!" shouted Ned, making a rush for the revolver and trying to seize it.

He got the weapon over the head instead of in his hand and fell, stunned and bleeding to the floor.

When he came to himself, 'Ran Davis and Dick were gone, and the Gold King stood with folded arms watching him.

"Well, so you are not dead after all, Young Klondike," he sneered. "That was a hard blow and I had half an idea that it had fixed you. I should have been sorry if it had been so."

Ned staggered to his feet and passed his hand over his bleeding head.

"You can keep your sorrow to yourself, Ralph Royston," he said. "Where's my friend? What have you done with him?"

"He is safe, don't you fret. But let me tell you one thing, young man; whether he remains safe or not depends upon yourself."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean just this, I am tired of your interference with my business, and propose to put a stop to it once and for all."

"In what way?"

"By driving you away from the Klondike if that is possible, but of that later; just now I want you to sign this little document. When you have done that I shall set you free."

The Gold King drew from the inside pocket of his coat a folded paper of legal appearance and handed it to Ned, at the same time pushing the lantern nearer to him, in order that he might see to read.

"What is this?" demanded Young Klondike. "I don't sign any papers of your drawing up, Ralph Royston, I tell you that flat."

"Read it and see before you attempt to decide."

Ned ran his eye over the paper and threw it back at the Gold King.

It was a statement purporting to come from himself, to the effect that the charges made by him on the Exchange against Ralph Royston were false, and prompted by malice.

Pinned to this interesting document was another which was still more impertinent. It was simply a quit claim deed of the Death Creek property, in favor of the Gold King.

"Do you really expect me to sign those papers?" he demanded. "Are you such a fool as all that?"

"I do expect it, and you will sign them!"

"Never!"

"Very good; then that means war between us, and I shall take the next step."

"Which will be what? Better tell it all out at once."

"Which will be to give you an hour to think the matter over in. At the end of that time I shall call again and once more ask you to sign. If you refuse it means death to Dick Luckey. You will never see him again."

"I care nothing for your threats. You would never dare to injure Dick!" said Young Klondike, proudly. "I dare you to lay a hand on him!"

"What! You are going to try bluffing, are you?" sneered the Gold King. "Very good! We'll see! I'll give you the hour, and then call again."

He retreated up the ladder, keeping Ned covered until he passed through the trap-door, for in spite of having disarmed him, he had a lingering suspicion that he might still be armed.

Once alone, Ned paced the cave like a caged lion.

He was half wild at the thought of what might happen to Dick, and yet to sign any such documents as those which had been presented to him would bring disgrace upon him and make it impossible for him to remain longer in the Klondike country.

All this Ned realized fully, and he saw that the Gold King had everything to gain by carrying out his threat, while on the other hand he ran but little risk even if he killed them both.

Nobody knew where they were, and it was not likely that anyone would ever think of looking for them in this out of the way spot, for once the Wilson Creek diggings were abandoned years might pass before anyone visited the place.

"For Dick's sake I shall have to yield," thought Ned. "But what will happen to me afterwards? If I tell the story on 'Change there will be those who will refuse to believe me. I—hello! What's that? Those mysterious sounds again?"

It was a pounding on the wall of the cave. It was not very loud, but it was very distinct.

Again and again it was repeated.

"Someone is trying to signal me," thought Ned. "Shall I reply or not?"

He listened.

Twice the wall was struck; then there was a break, then it was twice more.

Ned seized a stone and struck one good, hard blow on the wall.

Immediately there was one blow struck in return. Ned struck two blows and the answer was two blows.

Once more he tried it, this time striking three blows and three were given in return.

Then Ned put his ear against the wall and listened. He could hear the indistinct murmur of voices.

He would have shouted and tried to make himself heard, but he hesitated to attract the attention of his enemies in the hut above.

While he was pondering on the matter a blow

was struck, and then another and another, each one further along on the line of the wall.

"Hello!" thought Ned. "That means something. I won't answer for a moment. I'll see what comes next."

He waited and in a moment the same thing was repeated.

"They want me to come further up in the cave; that's what they are driving at, I'll bet," thought Ned, and he stepped to the point where the last signal had been given and struck the wall there.

Several blows in quick succession were struck in answer, which seemed to indicate satisfaction, and then the same thing was repeated, the blows leading Ned still further into the cave.

The last one was struck almost at the end and it was louder than any heard yet.

Ned struck in answer and then a blow came lower down on the wall, another lower still and then another almost down to the level of the rocky floor.

Ned dropped down and was about to give the answer when all at once he heard a voice call:

"Hello! Hello! Hello!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ATTACK ON THE HUT.

"HELLO!" called Ned, putting his mouth close to the rocks.

"Do you want to escape?" called the voice. "I'll help you if you do."

"Of course I want to escape!" called Ned. "Who are you?"

"Nobody you know. Have you a light in there?"

"No!"

"Matches! Got matches?"

"Yes."

"Good enough! Strike a light and you will see where the hole has been filled up with loose stones. Take them out and you can get through into here. I don't stop to make terms with you, but I know who you are. I'm a poor man. I expect a reward."

"You shall have one if you help me out of this fix," cried Ned. "Don't you forget it. I shall be liberal with you whoever you are."

"Go to work!" called the voice. "Don't lose any time or you may be too late to save your friend."

Ned struck the match and instantly saw just beyond where he was a place, close to the wall, where there were a great many loose stones.

To remove these in the dark was no very easy task, but he went right at it, throwing out the stones right and left.

As he worked he was encouraged by the voice:

"Keep it up! Keep it up!" it called. "There is a hole through the wall here. It won't take long."

They were all out but one big one at last. This Ned

could not remove; it seemed to run in under the wall, and was firmly wedged in its position.

Now the voice was silent. Ned called and called, but no answer came.

It was terribly disappointing, and Ned was just beginning to despair, when all at once a sharp blow was struck on the stone, and the welcome sound was heard again.

"Here, I am back!" cried the voice. "I've been up to the hut to see how things are going on with your partner. Have you got out all the stones?"

"Yes, they are all out," replied Ned—"that is, all but one. I can't move that."

"I'll soon fix that one. Where are you—standing in the hole?"

"Yes."

"Well, get out."

"All right! How about my partner? Did you see him?"

"No, he's a prisoner in the loft over the hut. Ralph Royston says he means to kill him. He's quite capable of it. Are you out of the hole yet?"

"Yes."

"Very well; then here goes!"

There was a crunching sound, and Ned knew that the stone had been pushed out into the hole from the other side.

Immediately a light shone into the hole, and the voice called:

"Come on, Young Klondike! The way is clear now."

Ned dropped into the hole and saw an opening leading out of the cave.

In an instant he had crawled through it, and found himself in another cave which seemed to be smaller than the one he had left. A man stood there holding a lantern. He was a rough-looking fellow, but he had an honest face.

Ned could not remember that he had ever seen him before.

"How can I ever thank you, my friend?" he said, as he scrambled to his feet. "Tell me your name and—"

"Never mind my name," interrupted the man. "If you don't know it, you won't have to tell it in case you are asked. Now about that reward."

"You shall have it."

"How much?"

"How much do you want?"

"I think a hundred dollars ought not to be too much."

"A hundred dollars is very little. I'll make it two and give it to you now."

"Well, come, that's liberal, boss. You ain't out of the woods yet, either."

"No, but you'll finish your work, I suppose?"

"I will if I'm spared, you bet. I'd just like to see you get the best of that scoundrel."

"You refer to the Gold King?"

"Yes, of course."

"You are one of his workmen, I take it?"

"Yes; worse luck."

"Drop him and be one of mine. I want good men to help me on a claim I am about opening on Death Creek."

"I'd like to, boss, but I'm so tied up with him that I don't see my way clear to shake him just yet. Still you may see me some day."

"I'll do what's right by you any time you come to me. Meanwhile, here is your money, and I'm ever so much obliged. Now, can't you complete the obligation by helping me to get my friend free?"

"Just what I can't do, boss. I wouldn't dare, but if you wait a bit I think they will all be so drunk that you can do the job yourself."

"Oh, they are drinking, are they?"

"Yes and heavily, but come, you want to get out of here. Some of them may take a notion to come down."

"What is this cave?"

"Oh, it's one of a series of four or five which open into the gorge. They are all connected, but Royston don't know there is any opening into the one you have just left. I kept that to myself."

"And why?"

"Because he had a nasty habit of doing up fellows in that cave, and I didn't know but my turn might come."

"Is he as bad as that?"

"You bet he is! Haven't you heard of the mysterious disappearances on the Klondike? Remember the Ruger case?"

"Indeed I do!"

"And the Brown case last summer?"

"Certainly. Do you mean to say—"

"Yes, I do; they were both done up in there. Oh, yes!"

Young Klondike shuddered.

Ruger and Brown were two prospectors who came to Dawson with plenty of money. Both had gone up the Klondike to look for claims, and neither of them were ever heard of again.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Ned. "I had no idea that the Gold King was as bad as that!"

"Don't you forget it, he is—just that bad. I tell you that any man makes a big mistake who tries to buck against him, but you're a good man, and everybody knows it. I'm not going to see you served as I've seen many another one served here."

While they were talking, the miner was leading the way through the cave. They soon came to the end, and passing through a narrow passage found themselves in the gorge.

"Good-by, Young Klondike," said the man. "I'm much obliged to you. I'm going to leave you here, and you'll have to work the rest of this business yourself. I've got that hole to stop up, and if I don't do it before Royston gets down there my name is Mud with a big M."

Thus saying, the man turned back into the cave and disappeared. How he expected to close the hole and make his own escape Ned could not imagine, but

he wasted no time in speculating on the matter. It was something to be free, but his heart sank as he thought of Dick. What was to be done to save him?

It was a thought which drove Young Klondike half wild.

Climbing up through the gorge, he was just about to mount to the platform where the hut stood, when, chancing to look behind him, he saw a light away down in the dark gorge which seemed to be moving his way.

"What's this? Someone coming?" thought Ned. "It won't do for me to be seen."

He drew in behind a big rock and waited, watching the light as it moved slowly up the gorge.

After a little he was able to discern two figures—one was a man, the other a woman.

Ned's heart beat fast as he strained his eyes for a better look. It beat faster still when he saw that the man wore a plug hat.

"Edith and the Unknown!" he murmured. "Heavens! what would have been their fate if I had not been here to warn them? But how in the world did they guess we were here?"

Then suddenly it came to his recollection that he had told Edith their destination, and the mystery was explained.

Ned started down the gorge to meet them, but immediately turned back.

"If the Unknown gets sight of me he will be sure to call out in that fog-horn voice of his," he thought, "and that won't do at all. I'll just wait here and give them a surprise."

So when they came opposite the rock, Ned suddenly stepped out in front of them.

"Silence!" he whispered. "Not one loud word."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, is it you, Young Klondike?" gasped the Unknown, flashing the lantern in Ned's face.

"Not so loud! Thank Heaven, you have come, Zed. You are just in time."

"Where's Dick?" asked Edith. "Oh, Ned, we have been so worried about you! Is anything wrong?"

"Anything wrong! Why, everything is wrong. Dick is a prisoner in the hands of the Gold King, who turns out to be as great a scoundrel as ever went un-hung."

"Just what I said!" exclaimed the detective. "I knew that man was as bad as they make 'em. Where is Dick? How does it happen that he is a prisoner and you are free?"

"Not because I've deserted him, don't you think that for one moment," said Ned; "but put out your lantern, it won't do for the light to be seen. I've got a strange story to tell you and you may as well hear it now."

The excitement of the Unknown when he heard all Ned had to tell can well be imagined.

"Something has to be done right away," he said. "And I don't think there is any question what that something has got to be."

"A bold attack on the hut?" asked Edith. "I see no other plan."

"There is no other plan," said Ned. "You took the words right out of my mouth."

"It must be," declared the detective. "Where is the hut, dear boy?"

"Right on top of the rocks, here."

"What's the enemy's force? How many are there inside?"

"Well, there's 'Ran Davis and Ralph Royston to begin with, and then there are the two men who captured us; besides these there may be others for all I can tell."

"And this friend of yours—no use trying for his help, you think?"

"I'm sure there is not. He seems to be in deadly fear of the Gold King."

"Then we've got to work the rifle ourselves, and the sooner we go at it the better."

"If we could only know when Royston and 'Ran Davis go down into the cave to look for me that would be the time to strike," said Ned. "Anyhow we'll go up and have a look. If we can't do any better we'll go right for them and take our chances. When it comes to shooting in the dark I should say we ought to be as much in it as they are, every time."

They now hurried up on top of the rocks, and stole on toward the hut.

A light burned in the lower room, but it was but faintly seen, for the bearskin had been hung up against the window again.

In the loft above where there was only one window, there was apparently no light.

Other than this the place seemed to be deserted. Not a sound reached their ears from the inside.

"Looks to me as if they were all asleep in there," said the Unknown. "Perhaps they ran the bottle around so lively that they are all dead drunk."

"We must know," said Ned. "I guess there's nothing for it but to make the attack. How shall we proceed?"

"By bluff—cold bluff," said the detective. "We are taking big chances, of course, but it is the only way."

"Your explanation explains nothing. Say what you mean."

"I mean to knock at the door and ask for Dick."

"Hello! That is taking the bull by the horns with a vengeance."

"Do you agree?"

"It means shooting."

"We can shoot."

"But it won't pay us to kill the Gold King. A lot of trouble would come out of that."

"Suggest some other plan, and I'm with you."

"How about my standing on your shoulders and trying to climb in at the window of the loft?"

"I suppose you could reach it that way."

"I'm sure I could. Shall we try it?"

"Do," said Edith. "If we could get Dick out without trouble, it would be a great thing."

"All right! Here goes?" said the detective, planting himself against the side of the hut directly under the windows of the loft.

It was a difficult matter for Ned to climb on his shoulders without making a noise, but he managed it. He could now reach the window well enough, but the sash seemed to be nailed down; at all events Ned could not move it and he wasn't high enough to peer in.

"Can't work it," he whispered. "It has just got to be a cold attack."

He jumped to the ground and took the revolver which the detective offered.

As for the Unknown, himself and Edith, they and their rifles. All three planted themselves in front of the door upon which the Unknown knocked with a heavy hand.

At once there was a scuffling of feet and a voice called out:

"Who's there? Who's there?"

"Open that door! Give up your prisoner!" shouted the Unknown. "Come on, boys! We've got them penned? Hello in there! Give up your prisoner or we'll blow you all to blazes and burn the hut over your heads!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE RACE TO DAWSON.

"BLUFF! Pure bluff!" breathed Ned. "I don't feel sure that it will work."

"We can only try it," said the detective. "Don't hesitate to fire when the door opens. We can wing them even if we don't kill."

But the door did not open. The Unknown's bluff had been a little too strong. Neither was there any answer. Profound silence reigned within the hut.

"What can it mean?" whispered Ned. "I'd rather fight than stand so."

"We mustn't stand so. We must force our way in," declared the detective. "I'll undertake that contract—here goes!"

But before the Unknown could make a move the door was suddenly flung open, and a shot fired by the man Rowan came whizzing out, narrowly missing the detective's head.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

All three instantly fired, and each aimed for the fellow's legs.

The result was highly satisfactory, for Rowan, with a yell, tumbled over on the floor, not seriously injured, but lamed for many a day to come.

As there seemed to be nobody behind him, Young Klondike and his party rushed boldly into the hut.

"Don't kill me! Don't kill me!" whined Rowan.

"I give right up! I told the boss it would come to this!"

It was only necessary to take one glance around to see that they had everything their own way.

There lay Skit dead drunk on the floor, and in one of the bunks 'Ran Davis was sprawling.

"Where is Ralph Royston?" demanded Ned, for the Gold King was nowhere to be seen.

"He's gone down into the cave to see you," groaned Rowan. "Gee whiz! How did you manage to get out?"

"None of your business. How can I fasten him down? Speak quick, unless you want us to finish you!"

"Pull that cord against the wall there—that will shoot the bolt."

Ned found the cord and lost no time in pulling it. Instantly a sharp click was heard and the voice of Royston shouted:

"Here! Here! What are you fastening me in for? Open the door! The boy is gone! What the blazes ails you, Rowan? Have you gone mad?"

"Ah, there! Stay there!" cried the detective, making a bolt up the loft ladder after Ned.

Royston roared and yelled, pounding on the trap-door all the while.

It was no use, however; move the door he could not, as the bolt was between the double boarding of which it was built, but Edith, who did not know this, stood ready for him with her rifle, in case he succeeded in getting through.

Then in a moment down the ladder came Ned, with Dick after him, and the Unknown bringing up the rear.

"Hooray! We've got him!" cried the detective. "Now what's to be done with the Gold King, boys?"

"Leave him where he is," said Ned, promptly. "All I care for now is to get back to Dawson, and let all the world know what sort of fellow Ralph Royston is."

"Isn't someone going to attend to me?" groaned Rowan. "I shall bleed to death if I am left here. I'm getting weaker every moment."

"Watch that trap-door," said Ned. "I'll look at this fellow's wounds."

"Don't you do it," said the Unknown, promptly. "Let him take his chances. Remember the miners. They may be down on us any moment. We want to light right out."

It seemed good advice, and most fortunate was it that they heeded it, for before they had fairly reached the mouth of the gorge, lights were seen flashing on the rocks behind the hut, and several men came running down.

"Slope!" whispered the Unknown. "The quicker we get down out of this the better."

They were none too soon.

Before they had time to get a hundred yards down the gorge, three shots came flying after them.

Looking back, they could see the Gold King standing on the rocks with the others.

He seemed to be very drunk. In fact, as well as they could see by the light of the lantern held by one of the men, it was all he could do to stand.

Waiting for nothing further, they hurried on around a bend in the gorge, and made the best of their way to the lower hut, where the dog team had been left.

Apparently no one followed them, and at this Young Klondike wondered.

"I don't understand it," he said. "Can there be some other way of getting down?"

"I think there is," said Dick. "After they tied me up there in the loft, they did a lot of talking among themselves, and I heard Royston ask twice what had become of our team, and once he said that someone must go down to the other hut and look after it. That would seem to show that they came up another way."

"And did anyone go?" asked Ned.

"No, not that I'm aware of."

"They were in the hut when we came up all right enough," said the detective, "for we saw them, and I don't believe anyone has been down there since."

Their anxiety was soon set at rest, for when they reached the hut there was the sled standing outside the door just where they had left it, and the dogs could be heard barking inside.

No time was lost in harnessing up.

Edith and the Unknown had left their team lower down at the mouth of the gorge, and that was found undisturbed too.

It all looked as though there was going to be nothing to interfere with their run right back to Dawson City.

Ned and the Unknown, who were doing the driving, cracked their whips, and off they went flying down the river to meet a surprise when they turned around the point of the big bluff which projected far out into the Klondike just below the mouth of the gorge.

The moon had now risen and there was light enough to enable them to see everything pretty clearly.

"Another team ahead of us!" cried Edith, as they went swinging around the bluff.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, I'll be hanged if it isn't!" exclaimed the detective. "Ye gods and little fishes! Who do you suppose it can be?"

"There are two men in the sled," said Dick, "but they are so wrapped up in furs that I can't make out who they are."

"It's the Gold King," said Young Klondike, quietly. "You can make up your mind to that."

"Wonder if it can be," mused the Unknown.

"I'm sure it is. Positive of it."

"But how can you tell?"

"By his build and general appearance."

"Well, well! Perhaps you are right, but how in the world did he get in there ahead of us? There's something for you to explain."

"Can't explain it. Probably there is some way

down from the Wilson's Creek mine that we know nothing about. Anyway they are there."

This was the correct explanation, although nothing more than a shrewd guess.

"Wish I had my glass," said the Unknown. "It's so bright that I believe I could easily make them out if I had."

"I've got mine," replied Ned. "I was pretty thoroughly searched by 'Ran Davis, but he only took my revolvers; the glass and all my money were left behind."

"I suppose they thought they could get those any time," said the detective, "but say, would you be good enough to get out said glass and let's have a look?"

"Just exactly what I'm trying to do, if you'll only be patient. It ain't easy to get at my hip pocket the way I am sitting here."

"Glass! Glass!" cried Dick. "I begin to think it's the Gold King, too; he'll be out of sight if we fool around much longer."

"Here's the glass," said Ned, handing it over.

The detective, who was noted for his clear sight at all times, adjusted the glass and had a look.

"Can't make them out," he was muttering, when all at once the larger of the two men turned and looked back.

"The Gold King sure!" cried the Unknown. "No doubt at all about it. That's who it is."

"Does he see us—think?" asked Ned.

"Of course! He is calling the attention of the other fellow to us. There! Now he looks around! 'Ran Davis! I thought as much!"

"Bad job, this," said Ned, as the Unknown handed back the glass.

"I'm sorry he's going to get to Dawson ahead of us. We want to be the first to tell our story on the Exchange," Dick remarked.

"Of course we do," said Ned, "and we've got to do it, too! Of course he can't go on the floor now, but he'll get around among the members before the board meets to-morrow, and tell some cock and bull story, which will make it hard for us to convince them of the truth."

"Surely we can get around too, even if we do get in a little behind them," said Edith. "We've got our friends, and I rather think that the word of Young Klondike is as good as Ralph Royston's any day in the week."

"Hold on! Hold on!" said the Unknown. "You are all wrong together. Ralph Royston has a double motive for wanting to be in Dawson early to-morrow morning. In my opinion he would have gone there anyhow. I have good reason for what I say."

It was hard talking from sled to sled and Ned, at the risk of getting the two teams entangled, now drove nearer to the Unknown.

"What do you know?" he called out. "What do you know? Let's hear all about it, but don't slacken speed on your life. Those two fellows are drunk, and we ought to be able to outdrive them. Work

over to the left so that we may be able to pass them at a safe distance, but keep the dogs going as tight as you can force them ahead."

"What I know," replied the Unknown, cracking his whip, "I learned while I was knocking about Dawson in disguise last night on the track of the Gold King. It's simply this; there's a company going out to Juneau next week, and it is proposed to send down all the gold they can carry—Colonel Tompkins' party, you know."

"Hello!" said Ned. "I suppose the Gold King means to work his usual racket, buy up all the loose dust he can lay his hands on and send it out by the colonel."

"That's just what he's up to. The colonel has the cash. It is he who furnishes the bills, not Ralph Royston by any means."

"Do you believe it?"

"I'm sure of it. Royston has made some money, of course, but he spends it as fast as he makes it. I know from what I overheard him say last night that he is pretty near the end of his rope. Besides that I heard so from other sources. There can't be any mistake."

"It don't surprise me a bit," said Ned. "Oh, if there was only some way of turning down that fellow once and for all!"

"Just what I am coming at," said the Unknown. "I've only been waiting for a good chance to speak about it, and this seems to be the time. From what I overheard the Gold King say I believe he is depending upon his commission on this deal to meet a big note, which falls due the last of the week. If we could only head him off in this and let that note go to protest, we would give Ralph Royston a black eye from which he would never recover, and this he richly deserves."

"It shall be done," said Ned, setting his teeth. "It would be a great day for Dawson City if we could run Ralph Royston out forever. Faster! Faster! We must get to town before him, come what will."

This was the beginning of an exciting race.

Never were dogs sent over the ice as fast as Young Klondike's dogs went then.

It soon became evident that the Gold King did not desire a fight, for when Ned and the Unknown pulled over toward the other shore of the Klondike he made no attempt to follow them, but just drove ahead at all possible speed.

Soon it became a question of whose dogs were the fastest, and after a little this began to be settled in favor of Ned's two teams, for they steadily gained and were soon opposite Royston's team with the river between them.

But now the tug of war was close at hand.

Right ahead of them was a point where the river passes between two mountains, a narrow gorge, not over forty feet in width.

To meet here meant a fight, and that was just what Ned wanted to avoid, and it began to look as

though meet they must, unless one of the opposing racers slowed down.

"We've got to get in ahead there! We must!" called Ned, to the Unknown.

"There'll be murder done if we meet in the gorge!" said Dick. "Ned, you had better give up! For Edith's sake let's acknowledge ourselves beaten and haul in."

"No, no!" said Edith. "Don't do it. Please don't do it. I'm ready to take every chance you are, boys, for I know very well that you wouldn't do it if it wasn't for me."

"We'll chance it," said Ned. "Edith, what do you say to shooting their dogs if it comes to a fight?"

"I say let's do it, anyway—do it before the fight comes on."

"It might be looked upon as taking rather an unfair advantage by our friends in Dawson, when this thing comes to be talked about. I shouldn't want to put it in anybody's power to think that."

"We've got to look out for ourselves, that's what!" called the Unknown. "If Edith thinks she can get a dead shot in the dark let her do it by all means."

"Settled!" cried Ned. "Get ready, Edith. All depends upon you now."

There was no better shot in all the Klondike country than Edith. What she could not do with a rifle could not be done.

So the brave girl watched her chance, and as they neared the gorge kept her eyes fixed on the other sled.

As they neared each other the Gold King half rose, and shaking his fist at them shouted out some defiant remarks, but the distance was still too great to distinguish words.

Nearer and nearer to each other they drew; it was evident that they must meet in the gorge.

"Now, Edith! Now!" cried the Unknown. "If it is to be done now is the time!"

Edith put her rifle up, but found it impossible to get an aim at the moving dogs.

"Fire! The Gold King is going to shoot!" cried Dick, as Ralph Royston clapped his rifle to his shoulder.

"I can't get an aim," said Edith.

The words were scarcely spoken, when Royston fired.

Evidently he had the same trouble as Edith, for the shot flew wild.

"We are in for it! You must fire!" cried the detective, "if you don't I shall drop the lines and do it myself."

Again Royston fired and still again.

Where the shots went to they could not tell, but they certainly did not come their way.

Suddenly Edith's rifle spoke, and at the same instant a tremendous report was heard right behind them.

"The ice! The ice!" shouted Ned.

"The dogs! The dogs!" cried Dick.

It was all settled now!

Young Klondike was in the gorge flying forward at furious speed, but the Gold King's sled had stopped and time must elapse before it could move again.

Two dogs were down as the result of Edith's skillful marksmanship, but Nature had taken a hand in, too, for between the two sleds a wide ice crack had opened which extended almost across the river.

If Young Klondike had passed the place a second later his dogs would have been in it, but as it was they went flying through the gorge, leaving the Gold King far behind.

CHAPTER X.

DOWNED AT EVERY TURN.

WHEN Young Klondike and his party reached Dawson they went straight to the hotel.

It had been determined to say nothing of their adventure to anybody but Mr. McCullagh, the president of the Mining Exchange. Ned proposed to call upon this gentleman the first thing in the morning and explain just what had happened, which he accordingly did.

Of course, President McCullagh was highly incensed at the part the Gold King had played.

"Ralph Royston ought to be run out of Dawson City as well as put off the Exchange, and I'd like to see it done," he said.

"You may have that pleasure before long," replied Ned. "Meantime, say nothing about all this until I give you permission, then publish it everywhere and it will help to complete the work that I am now about to begin."

"I'll do anything you say, Golden. You can count on me every time."

"I do count on you," replied Ned. "I know that you are willing to help me all you can."

"By the way, I shouldn't wonder if I could help you right now," said Mr. McCullagh.

"How?"

"You still want men to work that mine you got under the Death Creek deal?"

"I do."

"Well, there was a party of thirty who came up from Forty Mile last night. They haven't found things to suit them down there, so they came here to see what they could do."

"Where are they stopping?"

"At Baker's Hotel."

"Good! I'll engage every man of them, and start them up to Death Creek at once."

President McCullagh smiled.

"I like your enterprise, Young Klondike," he said. "You are just the kind of man I like to deal with, and by your leave I'll make a deal with you."

"I'm always open for a good deal," said Ned, laughing. "What's your scheme now?"

"Why, I'm going to have some forty men on my hands by the last of the week."

"Which means that you are going to close the mine on Mastodon creek. It can't mean anything else."

"You've hit it right. It's too thundering expensive to run it. I'm going to let it lie until spring."

"Just as well, perhaps; now then, what's your plan?"

"I'll trade the extension of Mastodon creek for the extension of Death Creek."

"I don't know anything about the extension of Mastodon creek."

"And I know nothing about the extension of Death Creek, so we are even there."

"Well, we are even if you put it the other way. I know nothing about the extension of Death Creek. I don't want to rob you."

"A fair exchange is no robbery. I know nothing about the extension of Mastodon creek."

"It will be an even deal, but I shall have the best of it."

"How?"

"Tell you when the deal is made."

"I'll trade."

"So will I."

"Settled. It's a go?"

"Yes."

They shook hands on it. The trade was now as secure as if the papers had been signed, sealed and delivered, for not for a million would either have gone back on his word.

"Now then, Young Klondike, tell me how you expect to get the best of the bargain?" asked the president.

"Simply this: I want to get the Death Creek diggings started. I want to see force enough on the ground to protect us against any attack by the Gold King."

"Is that all? I don't consider that you've got the best of the bargain at all. I'm under contract to pay those forty men ten dollars a day, and up at Mastodon creek, although there's plenty of gold coming out, I'm running behind on account of the big expenses. It will be cheaper for me to open up a new claim on a lead as promising as I believe Death Creek to be, for in the end I shall have something to show."

It was a pleasure to deal with a man like Mr. McCullagh, and Young Klondike left the president well satisfied with his trade.

It was as yet only seven o'clock and quite dark.

Both Dick and the Unknown had promised to be up on time to go with him to Mr. McCullagh's, but as both had overslept Ned found himself alone.

As he walked down Ottawa street on the way to Baker's Hotel, a dog team came sweeping in from the river, and on it were 'Ran Davis and the Gold King, both so drunk that they could scarcely keep their places.

The sled made a big sweep as the dogs turned the

corner and in the same instant the Gold King caught sight of Ned.

"You young scoundrel! You will kill my dogs, will you?" bawled Royston.

He whipped out his revolver and fired.

The bullet flew close past Ned's head and it might have been close enough to have finished him if 'Ran Davis in his drunken anxiety to help matters along had not suddenly pulled in the dogs.

It did help matters along with a vengeance.

The sled flew on down the hill with its own momentum, and even as Royston fired he pitched forward and went head first in among the dogs with Davis on top of him.

Such a snapping, snarling and shouting for help was never heard.

It was hard to tell which was man and which was dog.

Young Klondike laughed until his sides shook—he could not help it.

"Get yourself out of your scrape the best way you can, Ralph Royston," he called. "I've downed you temporarily at all events. Give me a little show and I'll down you for all time, as far as Dawson is concerned. Wait and you'll see."

With these remarks Ned hurried away, leaving Royston and Davis to pick themselves up as best they could—rather a difficult matter, seeing that both were too drunk to stand, and the last Ned saw of them as he looked back, they were both tumbling about with the dogs.

Ned's next call was at Baker's Hotel, where he engaged the Forty Mile men at the rate of twenty dollars a day, which he felt would secure him against any move the Gold King might make in that quarter.

In order that this liberal treatment might not lead to a general rise in wages—something which would have brought him the enmity of every mine owner on the Klondike, Ned bargained that the twenty dollar rate should only hold until Mr. McCullagh began work on the extension, and in any event not longer than six weeks, after which the rate was to be reduced to ten dollars, to all of which the men agreed, and Young Klondike had the satisfaction of seeing them start for Death Creek before he went back to the hotel for breakfast.

"I've downed the Gold King!" he announced, when Dick, Edith and the Unknown came to the table, which was just before he had finished his meal.

He told his story and set all hands to laughing.

"It must have taken them a thundering long while to get around the break," said the Unknown.

"Probably it extended clear across the river," said Dick. "I wouldn't wonder a bit if they had to go over the rocks on the side of the mountain."

This indeed was the case. Such breaks are not common in the frozen rivers of Alaska, but they sometimes occur and remain open for a considerable time.

The Gold King had found it immensely difficult to get around this one, and what made it all the more provoking the break closed again just as they got on the other side of it.

If Young Klondike could have known this, he would not have felt the worry about his men getting across that he did.

"We want to follow them right up," he declared. "They may be stalled at the break and think that they must come back."

"How about the gold?" asked Dick. "You don't propose to drop on that, I hope?"

"Indeed I don't; not after Ralph Royston trying to murder me in the open street. Just as soon as I'm through breakfast I'm going to attend to that."

And Ned was as good as his word.

He looked up Colonel Tompkins and found him entirely indifferent whose gold he bought, as long as he got the amount he wanted.

"But I suppose Mr. Royston will expect me to take his as usual," he said.

"The last I saw of Ralph Royston he was lying drunk on Ottawa street," said Ned, and he went on to tell Colonel Tompkins something of what had occurred.

"He's a great scoundrel, that same Gold King. I know him of old," said the colonel. "All right, Young Klondike, I don't care whose gold I buy. Bring me a million between now and noon, and that is all I ask for. I propose to start by one o'clock."

Now this would require tall hustling. Ned knew that perfectly well.

The banks did not recognize Colonel Tompkins; they had their own systems of getting gold out of Dawson, and they would not only have refused to deal with the speculators themselves, but it would have caused bad feeling if Young Klondike had withdrawn any of his own gold to sell to the colonel. It had to be bought direct of the brokers and miners or any tradesmen who happened to have gold to sell.

Ned hurried back to Dick and the Unknown, and all three went at it.

Ned picked up three hundred thousand dollars on the Exchange inside of half an hour, and Dick worked the miners at their own hotel for as much more, while the Unknown ran around among the saloons buying up all the small holdings he could lay his hands on.

By eleven o'clock it began to look as though they were not going to be able to raise the balance, when a party of miners down from Bonanza creek drove up to the hotel.

Ned knew the leader perfectly well, and had no trouble whatever in buying the entire holdings of the party which was more than enough to make up Colonel Tompkins' million.

Besides this he learned that the break in the river had closed, and that his Forty Mile men had been out well on their way to Death Creek.

All of which was exceedingly satisfactory, and it was decided to remain over until the next day and watch the effect of their move on the Gold King.

They had not long to wait.

By half past eleven Ralph Royston appeared in the street, washed, clean shaved and faultlessly dressed after the custom of the Klondike.

Sober he certainly was not, but he was quite sober enough to attend to business. He knew at what hour Colonel Tompkins proposed to start, and he knew that he would have to hustle to raise the required gold.

He soon discovered that it was a case where hustling did no good.

Young Klondike had anticipated him at every turn, and he finally learned the whole truth from Colonel Tompkins who cut him pretty short when he came to him at the hotel.

"I don't deal with murderers and blackmailers," said the colonel. "Young Klondike is good enough for me."

Ned heard afterward that Royston drew on him then, and a fight was only averted by the interference of the bystanders who failed to realize how serious a matter it was for the Gold King.

Nor did Young Klondike know until the next morning, when it was given out on the Exchange that Ralph Royston's note had gone to protest.

A little later came the news that the Gold King had disappeared from Dawson City, leaving thousands of dollars debts behind him.

Where he had taken himself off to, no one knew.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GREAT STRIKE ON DEATH CREEK.

YOUNG KLONDIKE had won, the Gold King was most effectually downed, and everybody was glad of it.

Now that it was all over, Ned told his story freely and it came to be generally accepted that the mysterious disappearances of the previous summer were to be credited to the gang controlled by the Gold King, pretending to be honest miners at work on Wilson's Creek.

Strange stories of the doings of the missing man came to be reported on all sides.

Dawson City would have made it very hot for the Gold King if he had returned about that time.

Young Klondike remained in town several days as there seemed to be no necessity for haste, and then with a number of additional men whom he was able to engage, started in company with Dick, Edith and the Unknown for Death Creek, at which place they arrived safe and sound.

It was with great pleasure that Ned found how faithfully old Silas Rigby had attended to the duties assigned to him.

The portable houses were up and finished, and all the arrangements for good work in this winter camp were complete.

Preparations for sinking a shaft alongside the frozen creek at the point where Young Klondike had made his rich strike, were already well under way.

The air was thick with the smoke of the great frost fires, and the diggers were ready to follow up the work.

Two other shafts besides the main one were to be started at the same time by Ned's orders, for Golden & Luckey never did anything on a small scale in these days, and as even in these preliminary preparations, not a little gold had been taken out, everyone felt highly encouraged.

All signs seemed to point to a big success on Death Creek.

Young Klondike's party immediately took possession of their new quarters, and Ned put himself in charge of the work which unfortunately was now delayed for several days by a big snow storm, a mishap to be expected at this time of year.

As soon as the storm was over the boys went right to work again, and as there were many willing hands to help them, the digging progressed in fine shape.

Ned took charge of Shaft No. 1; Dick of No. 2; and the Unknown in a general way looked after No. 3, although he was actually there but very little of his time.

It was the same old story with the detective.

It seemed just impossible for him to stay any length of time, and now he was always wandering away in the woods up the mountain out of which Death Creek ran, and occasionally on the river, where he would sometimes remain for hours at a time.

Once in a while he would come back with a rabbit or two, but Young Klondike knew very well that the detective was out neither for hunting or fishing. He was simply doing guard duty. The Unknown was on the lookout for the Gold King.

"For he'll come down on us some time or other, dear boy," he remarked to Ned one evening. "You may rest assured of it. I think I may say that I know Ralph Royston thoroughly; he is a man who never gives up, and he don't love you, Young Klondike. You may be very sure of that."

But Ned only laughed at the Unknown's fears.

They had plenty of men about them now, and forty more were daily expected—Mr. McCullagh's men down from Mastodon creek to work on the extension to Young Klondike's new claim.

Now the extension to a claim, in mining parlance means the land held by the claim owner on the line of the strike.

Thus if gold were to be discovered on a certain creek and the claim staked out by the discoverer was a hundred feet long by twenty-five wide, the land lying immediately beyond on the line of the creek, which is supposed to be the gold carrier, would be termed the extension.

The extension to any good mine is valuable, but it by no means follows that it will produce gold equal to the original claim, if indeed any at all.

As the work on Shaft No. 1 progressed it soon became pretty plain that Mr. McCullagh had acted wisely in making a deal for the extension to the Death Creek diggings.

As soon as they got below the frost line gold began to appear in increasing quantities.

Remember they were not working in the creek-bed where Ned had made his find, but alongside of it.

To have sunk the shaft directly in the creek would have been to make sure of a very wet shaft when spring opened, and a very expensive one to work, and at the same time nothing would have been gained by it, for by sinking alongside the creek it would be an easy matter to drift under its bed, and so get any gold which might be there.

The shaft was now down to the great black sand deposit which underlies most of the claims on the Klondike. Gold was to be expected here, and it was found according to expectation, but the great deposit was supposed to be lower still.

One afternoon just before dark, Dick joined Ned at No. 1.

Lanterns had just been sent down into the shaft, by the light of which the work was to be continued until quitting time, at six o'clock.

"Well, Ned, we've made a small strike in No. 2 at last," he said. "Quite a little lot of nuggets came up in the last bucket. How is it with you?"

"Same as ever," replied Ned. "The gold keeps on coming up, but in no great quantity as yet. I'm looking for a big strike every moment, though."

"It would be rather provoking if it didn't come, after all the trouble we've been at in this Death Creek deal."

"Wouldn't it now? It would just make me feel sick, but I don't look for that."

"Nor do I; haven't the least doubt we'll make a good strike sooner or later. We don't often find it as rich in a creek bed as we found it here, without something to back it up lower down."

"That's right. It will come. Give us time."

"Suppose we go down and have a look."

"I'm agreeable. Rather crowded, though. We better call up two of the men."

"How many are there down there?"

"Four altogether. Jones, Heinz, Rafferty and Smith."

"Call up Heinz and Rafferty. Jones and Smith are good common names, and it's the common folks who succeed in these days."

Ned laughed at Dick's odd fancy, and called down the shaft for Heinz and Rafferty to come up.

Then they descended into the shaft which was now twenty-four feet deep.

It would have seemed to an outsider a strange place to look for gold.

All around the top of the shaft the snow lay deep, and the earth on the sides was frozen as hard as a rock.

Below the frost line came the black sand and gravel.

This was slightly frozen wherever exposed to the air, but the frost was not imbedded in it as was the case with the earth above, and one smart blow with the pick-ax was sufficient to open up unfrozen soil.

"Well, boys, how are you making out?" asked Ned of the two miners, who stood there wrapped up to the eyes, big fur caps drawn down over their ears, and heavy gloves on their hands.

"I don't see any great show yet, boss," replied the man Smith. "There's gold everywhere we strike in, but in no great quantity."

"Then you consider the indications all good?"

"First class."

"Did you ever work in a mine where they were better, Smith?—for upon my word I never did!"

"No, boss, I can say the same as you—I never did. It does seem as though something ought to come out of here in the end."

"I think," said Ned, looking around, "that we'll begin our drift under the bed of the creek to-morrow. We may as well. The gold surely lies there, and we are deep enough to prevent the water coming through it in the spring."

"I don't know about that," said Smith, who was an old hand at the business. "The ground here is of a very soft and porous nature, and it is my opinion that you would be obliged to timber or you would have the water down into the hole in the early spring."

"It won't cost much to timber," replied Ned, "and long before the time comes when we shall have to do it we will either have proved the shaft worth timbering or be ready to give it up altogether."

"There's something in that, too, boss."

"There's everything in it, Smith. I'm anxious to know what the dirt under the bed of the creek has to show for itself."

"How deep down did old man Rigby go?" asked Dick.

"Never more than ten feet, he says."

"Then he never touched the true pay dirt at any point."

"Never! His experience really goes for nothing."

"Suppose we take a hack at it on this side now," remarked Dick, seizing the pick-ax. "You know I'm always lucky whether we find anything or not. Here goes for a lucky try now."

It was only meant for a joke, but look at the result!

As Dick started to pull out the pick after striking it into the dirt underlying the creek as far as he could drive it, a great mass of black sand became dislodged and tumbled out, almost swamping them.

"Whew! what a lift!" cried Smith, trying to work himself out of the sand.

Then all four gave loud exclamations of surprise.

"A big strike! A big strike at last!" cried Ned. "Dick, luck is with you! Always was! Always will be! Hooray, hooray!"

For the sand was literally full of small nuggets, and the wall exposed showed thousands upon thousands more.

CHAPTER XII.

THE END OF THE GOLD KING.

It was one of the biggest strikes on record.

In a week's time Golden & Luckey had taken out over a hundred thousand dollars in dust and nuggets, and the supply was scarcely touched.

News of the big find soon spread all over the region, and Dawson City went wild.

During the second week it was one constant succession of dog teams coming up the river to Death Creek.

Everybody on the Exchange wanted to take a hand in the Death Creek deal now.

If Golden & Luckey had chosen to make a stock company of the claim the shares would have brought a fabulous price, but they had no such intention. On the contrary they were determined to keep it to themselves.

Among other callers was Mr. McCullagh, who came up in a driving snow storm the last of the week.

"Well, well! So you have come at last!" exclaimed Ned, as the president presented himself in camp. "I've been looking for you every day these two weeks. Where are those forty men?"

"Coming, coming," declared Mr. McCullagh, in his cheerful way. "Fact is, boys, I found it rather more difficult to close up at Mastodon creek than I had expected, but I hope to have the gang over here inside of a few days."

"What do you say to your Death Creek deal now? Are you satisfied with it?" asked Ned.

"Well, now, I ought to be. I told you I should get the best of you, but come, are all these stories true that I hear about this wonderful strike?"

"I doubt if it could be exaggerated, but you shall see the shaft for yourself."

"Not to-day; wait till it has done snowing. I'm quite willing to take your word for it, Young Klondike. I only hope you make out as well on the extension to Mastodon creek, but I tell you frankly I don't think you will."

"Don't expect it," said Ned. "I shall be satisfied with what ever comes out of my Death Creek deal."

They talked mining matters for awhile and then Ned inquired about the Gold King.

"Nothing has been heard of him," said Mr. McCullagh, but I tell you what it is, it would be decidedly unhealthy for Ralph Royston to show himself in Dawson City again."

"Why?" asked Ned. "Has anything new been discovered?"

"Lots! One of the Wilson's Creek gang has confessed. A fellow named Longmore. There has been at least half a dozen murders of prospectors in that cave where the Gold King put you."

"It don't surprise me. I'd like to bet that this man Longmore is the same person who set me free."

"Wouldn't wonder. What sort of looking man was he?"

Ned described him as accurately as he could, and

Mr. McCullagh declared that it was certainly the man.

"I'll ask him when I go back," he said. "I suppose you'd like to have us go as light as possible on him if he admits he is the man?"

Of course Ned spoke a good word for Longmore, and the conversation then ran into other channels.

Next day proved an unusually successful one as far as digging was concerned.

There was as much as eight thousand dollars taken out of Shaft No. 1, and gold was struck in paying quantities in Shaft No. 2, with every indication that the pay streak in No. 1 extended down that way.

"Well, Dick, I think we may call the experimental chapter of our Death Creek deal closed," remarked Ned the following morning, just after Mr. McCullagh left them to return to Dawson. "The thing is a huge success."

"My old luck," replied Dick. "Really it would be kind of a relief to strike a failure once."

"We won't strike for failure unless we have to; but who is that fellow coming up the creek?"

A tall man, well wrapped up in very shabby clothes was toiling wearily through the snow in the direction of the camp.

"He's a stranger to me," said Dick. "I don't know him at all."

"Some poor wretch looking for work probably. Wonder whose camp he could have come from? A man could hardly do much walking in such weather as we've had the last few days."

"I'll give him a job if he wants to go to work," said Ned. "Where's the Unknown this morning? I haven't seen him since I got up."

"Oh, I'm sure I don't know. Off on one of his usual tramps I suppose."

"Then he's foolish. There is nothing to be feared from the Gold King now, and some day or another he'll get caught in a big snow storm, then there'll be the deuce to pay."

But there was no use in thinking that they could tie down the Unknown. That was something not to be thought of. Danger or no danger, the detective would come and go as he pleased.

The boys now started to walk to shaft No. 1, and on the way met the stranger, who saluted Ned with a wave of the hand.

"Is this Young Klondike what I'm speaking to?" he drawled out, at the same time looking at Dick.

"I'm supposed to be Young Klondike," said Ned. "What can I do for you, my friend?"

"Waal, yer can't do nothing better for me than to give me something to eat," drawled the man, "for I'm abeout starved, and that's what's the matter, but it hain't fer myself that I'm here at all."

"What's the trouble, friend?" asked Ned, kindly. "Tell your story. You shall have all the provisions you want."

"Waal, neow, that's good of yer, boss, and I knowed it would be so. I told my pards that all that

was necessary was for one of us to work down to this here mine and we'd be saved."

"What's the trouble? Tell the whole story. You can get all you want to eat here. We've plenty of provisions and don't want to see any man go hungry while we have enough and to spare."

This was Young Klondike all over. There was no more liberal mine owner in the entire district—that everybody knew.

Instead of going down to the shaft Ned took the man right into the house, and Edith set a good breakfast before him which he devoured ravenously.

While this was going on he told his story, which awakened all Ned's sympathies in the highest degree.

His name, he claimed, was John Butcher; with four other prospectors he had been at work on the mountain across the Klondike from Death Creek when winter set in. They met with but indifferent success, but were still taking out enough to make them feel like holding on. Three weeks before they had been snowed in and at a most unfortunate time, for their provisions were almost exhausted and they were just on the point of sending to Barney McGraw's camp for a fresh supply.

Being unable to do this, they had been reduced almost to starvation, and scurvy had seized all hands but Butcher himself, who at last managed to work through the drifts and reach Death Creek, leaving his partners so sick that he expressed great doubt about finding them alive on his return.

All this in his drawling way, with many repetitions, the man told.

"I don't know what to do," he said. "You can't get them fellers out until they are better; there isn't no sort of use trying, for no dogs could never get through them drifts. If some of you fellows could go up there and take good grub we'd soon have them on their feet again."

"Let's you and I go, Ned!" exclaimed Dick. "We really can't spare any of the men the way things are working now."

"I'm willing," replied Ned, promptly.

"If you and Dick go, I'm going, too," said Edith. "I'm just longing for a tramp."

Ned looked doubtful, and asked the man how far it was to the camp.

"About six miles there and back," he replied. "It's tough walking for the lady, though."

"I could go on snow shoes," declared Edith. "You don't know me."

"I don't suppose I do, but I know that snow shoes would do you no good," replied Butcher. "The crust is as hard as iron; there really isn't any difficulty about walking, now that I've broken the way through the drift."

"We could get back before dark, think?" asked Ned.

Butcher thought they would be sure to if they started soon, and after a little more talk it was decided to go and that Edith should accompany them;

indeed an errand of mercy like this was right in her line.

It was nine o'clock and still dark when they started, but they expected to see the sun up before they reached the base of the mountain where the man claimed the camp lay.

Edith prepared four baskets filled with provisions, and besides these Ned took several pairs of warm blankets, for Butcher claimed that his partners were but poorly provided in that regard.

Leaving word for the Unknown where they had gone, they crossed the Klondike and passed down on the opposite side of the river a little over a mile, where Butcher turned into a narrow gorge leading back among the mountains. It was a place Young Klondike had often noticed, although he had never entered the gorge before.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Dick. "This isn't the place where you told us we were to turn in."

"What's the reason it isn't?" asked Butcher, in a half surly way. "I think I described it plain enough."

"You certainly said that it was the fourth gorge down the river striking a line directly across from Death Creek," said Ned, "and this is only the third."

"I said the third, or I meant to say it," growled the man.

"Of course it don't make any difference," said Edith; "why don't we go on?"

"It only makes this difference, we left word for the Unknown that we were going up the fourth gorge," persisted Ned. "It's all right if it is all right, but if anything should happen to go wrong he won't know where to look."

"If you suspect me, gentlemen, you'd better not go on," said Butcher, in aggrieved tones. "I'm as straight as a string, I am. I never wronged a man in my life that I know of, but at the same time I don't want to urge none of you to go into the mountains along with me against your will."

"Oh, we are going," said Ned, promptly. "I don't mean to say that I suspect you, friend."

"Well, it looks that way when you talk like you do."

"Oh, you don't understand," said Dick. "We have an enemy, and he happens to be a bad one. Perhaps you may have heard of him—he is known as the Gold King."

No; Mr. Butcher had never heard of the Gold King, he declared, but then he explained that by saying that he was a comparative stranger in the Klondike country, having only come to Dawson City the previous fall.

By this time they had started up the gorge where the snow certainly did lie deep.

It was a trail of many turnings and dark frowning precipices overhung it on either side.

Morning dawned when they reached the first level about a hundred feet up from the river bank.

Here an extended view of the whole region could be had.

The Death Creek mine was plainly visible; they

could see the workmen moving about between the shafts.

"It was here that I first spotted your shop, boss," Butcher explained to Ned. "I knowed well enough that nobody but Young Klondike could start up a place like that since I'd been out last, for then there wasn't nobody but one old man living over there; but come, we must be on the move."

"How much further is it?" asked Dick.

"Not over a mile and a half," replied the man. "It lies right up this way between them big rocks over there and——"

"Stop!" cried Ned, suddenly. "What does this mean?"

It meant enough to scare Mr. Butcher, for he suddenly sprang away and ran like a deer, disappearing between the two big boulders which marked the entrance to the continuation of the gorge.

Ned flung up his rifle and sent a shot flying after him. He aimed low purposely, intending to hit the fellow's legs, but he missed him altogether, and thus in a few seconds they found themselves alone.

"What in thunder is the row, Ned?" cried Dick, amazed at this sudden change.

"Treachery!" said Ned. "We are betrayed! We must get Edith out of here just as quick as we can."

"Don't mind me," said Edith. "I see nothing wrong. You'll have to explain."

"Look at that trail there between the rocks!" cried Ned. "Don't you see there are half a dozen different footsteps in the snow?"

"Blest if there isn't!" said Dick, "and, of course, they must all have been made since the last storm."

"Of course! Butcher has lied to us. That alone is enough to make me distrust him, and when he comes to run away like that we may consider the matter settled. I haven't the least doubt that this is a plot of the Gold King."

"We must get down to the river at once," said Edith. "Why do you wait, Ned?"

"Just a moment to see if anything happens. We don't want to run into a trap."

"That's right," said Dick. "We want to be careful. They expect us to start down. I wish there was some other way of getting back to the river besides going down the gorge."

They peered over the precipice, but it offered only a straight descent over ragged rocks.

All was silent, and as there seemed no possible reason why they should not go back down the gorge and every reason for not going ahead they now started to descend.

All went well until they came to the first turning when all at once six men armed with rifles stepped from behind the turn, and planted themselves directly in their path.

"Trapped!" gasped Ned, for there was the Gold King in the lead.

Rifles covered them; they did not dare to move.

"Up hands, Young Klondike!" cried Royston

"I've got you now! Surrender, or I'll blow you sky high!"

The words were scarcely uttered, when the sharp crack of several rifles was heard from the rocks above them.

Three men fell; the other three with one frightened glance upward, turned and fled down the gorge as fast as their legs could carry them.

Here was a turning of the tables with a vengeance. Two of the fallen men were evidently dead, but the third, who was the Gold King himself, managed to scramble to his feet.

"Save me, Young Klondike! Save me!" he gasped. "Oh, Heavens! It's all up with me unless you lend me a helping hand!"

"Who are they? What does this mean?" cried Ned, springing forward and catching Ralph Royston who would have fallen but for his friendly aid.

"They were my men!" groaned the Gold King. "They are my deadly enemies now that my money is gone. Run me out of this! Help me! They are coming! Ah! Again!"

Once more the rifles cracked, and the shots came flying about their heads. But it was all a miss this time, and a moment later they were around the turn, Ned supporting the Gold King who could scarcely walk.

Now to the mouth of the gorge was no great distance, and if they could have made it the danger which came upon them a few moments later might have been saved.

But it was not to be that way. In their walk up the gorge they had simply followed the man Butcher without paying any particular attention to where they were going, for which reason it was not surprising that they now took the wrong turning and were in another gorge before they knew it, a blind lead which soon brought them into a sink, or circular open space among the rocks where the gorge came to a sudden end.

Here stood a hut built up against the rocks; the door was open and they could see a bright fire burning inside on the hearth.

"What place is this?" asked Ned, but Royston did not answer. Even as Young Klondike addressed him his head sank upon his shoulder and he began to slip down to the snow.

"He has fainted!" cried Edith. "We shall have to carry him into the hut."

"He is dying," said Dick. "It will soon be all up with the Gold King, I am afraid."

"You are mistaken," said Ned. "It's all up with him now. The man is dead!"

It was so.

When they carried him into the hut they knew that they had a dead man on their hands before they could lay him down.

Shot in the region of the heart by one of his own companions, the exertion had been too much for Ralph Royston, and he died there at the door of the hut.

"What's to be done?" gasped Dick. "If we stay here those fellows will be down upon us in a moment. This was all a plot to trap us and hold us for ransom."

"I believe you," replied Ned. "No doubt the plot was of Ralph Royston's getting up, and these fellows, tired of his treachery, meant to do him up and have the game to themselves. We shall have to abandon him where he is, and get back into the gorge without an instant's delay."

"You are sure he is dead?" asked Edith. "Bad as he has been, I should not like to go off and leave a dying man."

"He's dead; his heart has ceased to beat," said Ned. "We must leave him, and— Ah, too late!" Several men came running into the sink.

Ned's sharp eye counted eight of them even as he spoke.

They were rough-looking fellows and heavily armed. There could scarcely be a doubt that these were the men who had murdered the Gold King.

"Shut the door!" cried Dick. "We've got to defend ourselves! Shut the door, quick!"

Ned slammed the door, and shot the heavy bolt, Edith at the same time pulling in the window shutter and making the big hook intended to secure it fast on the inside.

They were not an instant too soon, for in another moment the gang were hammering at the door.

"Open up here, Young Klondike! Open up!" shouted one. "We know you are here!"

"Who is it I have the pleasure of speaking to?" answered Ned, as calmly as possible. "I don't open this door to strangers—no!"

"I'm Jim Murphy, if you want to know," came the reply.

The name was that of a notorious outlaw, who had long been a terror in the Klondike country. Ned shuddered at the thought of Edith's fate if they should be unfortunate enough to fall into this fellow's hands.

"I don't know you, and I don't want to know you," he replied; "my advice to you is to go about your business and leave us alone."

"My good friend, this is my business. I want the Gold King. He went back on me. I've sworn to kill him and I mean to keep my word."

"Then you have kept it, for he's dead already," replied Ned. "The Gold King will never go back on you again."

"What! What! Dead!"

"Yes, dead!"

"Good enough! That suits me right down to the ground. Open up, Young Klondike, we won't harm you!"

But Ned still refused, and in a moment there was a terrible racket. The outlaws were throwing themselves against the door and hammering at the window shutters, but after ten minutes' hard work they had not succeeded in breaking in.

"Young Klondike, Young Klondike! Hello!" cried Murphy. "Do you hear what I say?"

"Probably I shall when you say it," replied Ned. "I can hear your voice plain enough."

"We want a hundred thousand dollars out of you. This is the first and last call. Will you pay it or will you not?"

"Decidedly not," answered Ned. "Your request is a modest one, I must say."

"Very well, then; here goes. Underneath this hut is a box of dynamite, and the fuse is sticking out from under the boarding. We are in no mood to fool away time here; it's either come with us and give up the sum I name, or I touch a match to that there fuse and blow you all sky high!"

"Phew!" cried Dick. "This is interesting, but we can't give up, Ned."

"Never! I will never consent to place Edith in the power of those men!"

"Your answer!" called Murphy. "Is it yes or no? My boys will take care of your friends till we come back with the money or dust, whichever you have a mind to make it. I want your answer now."

"You have it," replied Ned, quietly. "I don't surrender. I don't believe in your dynamite—this is only a bluff."

"Then by Heavens I'll make you believe in it! I'll light the fuse, anyhow. There, it is lighted now! Hear it sizzle? I tell you there is just two minutes to decide in. No use for you to call unless you mean business, and if you call after the two minutes are up we shan't hear you—we shall be away off up the gorge."

The voice ceased to speak then and footsteps could be heard moving away over the snow.

It was a terrible situation, but whether it was bluff or not, Ned could only guess.

"Surrender!" cried Edith. "Never mind me! We can take no such chances as this."

"Never surrender! There's no need!" spoke a voice behind them. And to their utter amazement when they looked around there stood the Unknown.

A door was wide open in the back of the hut, and men were trooping through it.

"Oh, yes, it's me!" chuckled the little detective. "I learned the secret of this place a week ago. Only another cave leading out under the rocks to the river, dear boy; there are Mr. McCullagh's men. When I got back to Death Creek and found you had gone off with that fellow, I knew it was all a plot to trap you.

Happened to meet these gents coming up to our place. Knew they'd bring you here, so I thought I'd treat you to a surprise. By the Jumping Jeremiah! So Ralph Royston is dead, is he? Serves him just right. Don't you worry about the dynamite, Edith, for there isn't any. That's right, Ned! Throw open the door! After 'em, boys! A hundred dollars to every one of you who catches his man!"

It was just like the Unknown to turn up as he did, and also just like him to burst out with this torrent of words, giving no one else a chance to speak; in short, the sudden invasion of the detective and his men was exactly what might have been expected of him, for the Unknown always possessed the happy faculty of turning up just at the right time.

His fortunate appearance ended all anxiety on the part of Young Klondike and his friends, and it also ends our story, for Murphy and his men made their escape to the mountains, and have never been seen since.

But there need not have been any such great alarm, for the dynamite threat proved to be pure bluff. Not only was there no dynamite under the hut, but no place for any, for the floor timbers were laid directly on the ground.

They buried the Gold King in the snow, and when spring came Young Klondike saw him decently interred, although this was a consideration which Ralph Royston scarcely deserved.

The extension to the Death Creek mine proved almost as rich as the claim started by Golden & Luckey. Both are still being worked to great profit to their owners.

There has been no interference since the death of the Gold King.

Of course the success of these mines brought a lot of people into the desolate region around Death Creek, and quite a town has sprung up at the foot of the mountains. By far the larger part of the buildings are owned by Golden & Luckey, but they are selling them out as fast as they can, for they have no desire to be land monopolizers, and want to see the new town succeed.

Shortly after this Young Klondike and his friends went into a new deal which resulted in certain adventures of unusual interest. These will be found described in the next number of the series entitled, "YOUNG KLONDIKE'S MASTODON MINE; OR, THE BIGGEST STRIKE OF ALL."



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